

DETECTIVE BURR'S GREAT BANK CASE!

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THE WALL STREET SHARPER'S SNAP.

BY HAROLD PAYNE,

AUTHOR OF THE "DETECTIVE BURR" NOVELS, "THE MATCHLESS DETECTIVE," ETC., ETC.



"THEN YOU ADMIT YOUR GUILT?" SAID THE DETECTIVE. "A THOUSAND TIMES NO!"

The Wall Street Sharper's Snap;

OR,

The Bank Cashier's Clue.

BY HAROLD PAYNE,

AUTHOR OF "DETECTIVE BURR" NOVELS, ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE DEAD CASHIER.

DETECTIVE BURR was just finishing a late breakfast, when the door-bell rung and a moment later a young man, pale and excited, was ushered into the dining-room.

He was the messenger of the great banking house of Dodd, Myers & Co., of Wall street.

Thad guessed that something dreadful had happened as soon as he got a glimpse of the young man's face, and before he spoke.

"What's in the wind, young man?" demanded the detective, noticing that the messenger hesitated.

"Mr. Myers wishes to see you at the bank at once, sir, if you can come," faltered the messenger in a tremulous voice.

He had neglected to mention what bank he was from, but at the mention of the name of Myers Thad knew, or thought he knew, where he was from.

"You come from the banking-house of Dodd, Myers & Co., do you?" observed the detective, rising from the table.

"Yes, sir," was the reply.

"I thought so. What has happened?"

The messenger hesitated again, and finally stammered out:

"The cashier's been killed, sir."

"The cashier has been killed?" echoed Thad, amazedly.

"Yes, sir."

"When did it happen?"

"Last night some time. At least he was found dead this morning."

"Who was the first to discover him?"

"Mr. Myers, the president, himself."

"How did it happen that none of the subordinates—the clerks—chanced to discover the murdered man?"

"Because he was in the cash-room, which is never opened except by the president or the cashier."

"Ah, I see. The room was not opened, then, until the president came down?"

"No, sir."

"Well, I will accompany you at once," and without another word the great secret-searcher took his hat and left the house, followed by the messenger.

At the corner of the street Thad entered a cab, and twenty minutes later arrived at the great Wall street banking-house.

Through some mysterious and unaccountable channel the news of the murder had already got abroad and an eager throng of morbidly curious people surrounded the door of the bank, covered the sidewalk and were kept back with difficulty by two stalwart policemen who had been called for the purpose.

Within, however, none but an acute observer would have noticed that anything unusual had happened.

Everything was quiet, the clerks were all in their places, and, but for the curious glance they bestowed on the great detective as he passed through on his way to the cashier's office at the rear, even he could hardly have imagined that a terrible tragedy had occurred in their very midst.

A knock at the door brought the president, who opened the door himself, and the caller was quickly ushered into the cashier's office, which was also the cash-room of the bank.

Thad's eyes wandered at once over the room and took in its contents.

At the further end stood the great safe, which was built into the wall as a part of the edifice, the door standing open, and on the floor directly in front lay some object covered with a white cloth.

Near a window on one side sat a man with his face buried in his hands, and at desks in various parts of the room clerks sat writing.

All this the detective saw and noted before recurring to the president who stood expectant near him.

As Thad's eyes encountered those of the president the latter said:

"My messenger informed you what had occurred, of course, Mr. Burr?"

"Yes, he told me that the cashier had been murdered," was the replied.

"The messenger was a little at fault in that respect," observed Mr. Myers, "but that might have grown out of his natural agitation and nervousness; but—"

"Am I to understand that the cashier was not murdered, then?" interrupted Thad, impatiently.

"Yes. The cashier was not murdered," and the president's eyes strayed toward the man who sat at the table with his face buried in his hands; "and that is the mystery of it. It was the assistant cashier who was murdered, and he had no right, without the knowledge of either the cashier or myself, to enter the cash-room, and, indeed, he was not supposed to either have a key to this room or to possess a knowledge of the combination with which the safe was locked."

"And yet he was found in here, and murdered?"

"Yes."

"Was everything in its place when you entered the room?"

"Everything."

"No indication of an entrance having been effected from the outside?"

"None whatever. However, I was not the first to enter the room this morning. My cashier was here first."

"Ah, that puts a different face on the matter. Perhaps he can explain the mystery?" remarked the detective, significantly.

"Unfortunately he cannot," returned the president, ruefully. "But you have not heard all the story."

"No?"

"A heavy robbery accompanied the murder."

"A robbery?"

"Yes. Three hundred thousand dollars."

During the latter part of the conversation the two men had walked slowly toward the cashier's desk, and at the same time the cashier had arisen and taken a few steps toward them, so that by the time the president ceased speaking the cashier was only a few feet away—within easy earshot, in fact.

Thad, however, either overlooked the fact of his nearness or was indifferent to it, for he said at the conclusion of Mr. Myers's statement:

"And your cashier was the only one who could have possibly entered this place and opened the safe, except by force?"

"Except the president himself," interposed the cashier, with a glance at his superior.

The president reddened, bit his lip, but maintained his equanimity.

"Yes," he replied in a sorrowful tone, "we two are the only ones to whom it would have been possible to have done this."

Without possible collusion with outside parties," suggested the detective inquisitor.

Neither of the bank officials made any reply, but the president shook his head dubiously.

"How, then, do you account for the presence of the assistant cashier, and he murdered?" demanded Thad.

"I do not pretend to account for it," rejoined Mr. Myers. "It is all a mystery—a horrible, inexplicable mystery."

"How long had the cashier been here before you arrived, Mr. Myers?" asked the secret-searcher, still ignoring the presence of the cashier.

"Not to exceed five minutes, so he tells me, and he is corroborated by the clerks."

"And he has not been away from the bank since?"

"No, sir."

"Then the money must have been removed some time during the night, you think?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Why not on some previous occasion?"

"For the simple reason that the money was only brought up out of the vault and put into the safe late yesterday afternoon. We never put large sums of cash in the safe except where a draft is to be paid, or something of the kind. A depositor is to call this forenoon to draw out the sum of three hundred thousand dollars, and the cashier, in order to have the amount ready, took the money out

of the vault down-stairs and placed it in the safe late yesterday afternoon."

"You are sure the money was in the safe when the bank closed, are you?" asked Thad.

"I have the cashier's word for it."

Here he gave the cashier another questioning look.

Thad also studied the man's face, and the bank official dropped his eyes under the double scrutiny and grew scarlet.

After a few moments' silence, the detective resumed:

"So far, the status of the case appears to be about like this: The bank has been robbed of three hundred thousand dollars and the assistant cashier murdered. Only two persons were supposed to be in possession of the key to the cash-room and the combination of the safe, and those were your cashier and yourself. There is nothing to indicate that the robbery and murder were committed by outside parties. On the contrary, the absence of any marks of violence prove conclusively that whoever the robber and murderer was, he must have entered with a key and opened the safe with the secret combination, which was only known to yourself and your cashier. So far the case appears to be simple enough. But now comes the mystery. First, how comes the assistant cashier there? and second, how came he to be murdered?"

"That is the great mystery," sighed the president.

"Not being intrusted with the key of the room or the combination by which the safe was locked," pursued the investigator, "he assuredly had no right to be in the cash-room during the absence of his superiors, and if the indications pointed to the fact that the room had been entered by force and the assistant cashier had been absent, suspicion would at once settle upon him, but the fact of his being murdered, and that, too, directly in front of the safe, which is found standing open and robbed of its contents, involves a mystery that, on its face, appears insoluble. Let us examine the premises."

With that Thad began a thorough examination of the room, which did not conclude until every portion, every inch of the walls and every door and window, had been subjected to a minute scrutiny. But at the end of it all he was forced to the conclusion at which the president had long since arrived—that the premises had never been entered by force, or in other words, the perpetrator of the crime had had a key and had entered the regular way.

He next examined the safe. There was no indication that it had been opened otherwise than with the combination, the bolts being regularly thrown. But as he examined the outside of the door, he noticed something that attracted his attention.

It was a scratch about an inch in length, and describing the exact circle of the knob, showing that it was made by the hand which had turned the knob, and most likely with a ring on one of the fingers of the hand! There could be no doubt about the freshness of the scratch, and the detective's eyes reverted instinctively to the hands first of the president and then of the cashier.

To his surprise, the cashier wore no ring except a small plain gold band, which could never have inflicted the scratch, while the president, although a man of over fifty, and somewhat conspicuous for the simplicity of his dress and absence of jewelry, wore a large and rather showy diamond ring on the middle finger of his right hand!

This was not only a surprise, but a setback to the detective, for up to that moment he had decided that the cashier was the guilty party. And even now he could hardly bring his mind to the point of believing the benevolent, soft-spoken old gentleman, whose name had never been tarnished with a single suspicion, could be guilty of such a terrible crime.

Thad asked just one question after making the discovery.

"Is your establishment in any way embarrassed, Mr. Myers?" he inquired, turning to the banker.

"Not in the least," was the reply. "The loss of the three hundred thousand dollars will not affect us, as our cash assets exceed our liabilities several millions, according to our last statement."

"In that case," Thad told himself, "there could be no object in the president and principal stockholder robbing himself, and certainly none in murdering his assistant cashier."

He then proceeded to make an examination of the dead body.

This was a simple matter.

A bullet hole in the right temple attested the manner in which he had met his death, which, in the absence of any weapon by which he might have taken his own life, was undoubtedly murder.

Re-covering the body to await the arrival of the coroner, the detective again turned to the president.

"Let me have a few words with you in private, Mr. Myers," he requested.

"Certainly," rejoined the president. "Come up into my private office."

The private office, or suite of elegant apartments which included the private office, rather, was on the second floor directly over the cash-room, and was reached by a narrow stairway leading up from the cash-room. There was another entrance from the street, of course, but the president usually used the private stairway, as it was sometimes undesirable that it should be generally known that he was in his private office, and he could reach it by this route without the outside world being the wiser.

Up this narrow stairway the rather portly president mounted, followed by the detective, who in turn was followed by the cashier.

The latter had hesitated and showed unmistakable signs of intending to remain behind, but Thad Burr was desirous of keeping him under his eye, and therefore beckoned him to follow.

When they had reached the anteroom, however, Mr. Myers turned and gave the cashier to understand by a look that it was not desirable that he should come any further, so he mutely assented and took a seat in the anteroom, while Thad and the president proceeded into the private office, and the latter closed and fastened the door.

"What I wished to ask you," began the mystery-investigator, as soon as they were seated, "is, first, whether you have any reason to suspect your cashier of this crime. I mean to say, outside of the evidence we have discovered this morning."

Mr. Myers was silent a moment, and then replied:

"Yes, I regret to say that I have."

"What is it?"

"Well, in the first place, I have been aware for more than a year that he has been leading a fast life and spending more money than was consistent with his income."

"Did he gamble?"

"Yes, heavily."

"How did you ascertain these facts, Mr. Myers?"

"Through his fellow employees in the bank, who are jealous of him."

"Might not jealousy have led them to misrepresent the facts?"

"It might, that is true," admitted the banker.

The banker arose to get something from his desk and at the same moment Thad heard a door open and close in the anteroom. There was a small wicket in the door through which he could look out, and he took advantage of it.

He looked just in time to see the cashier hand a fellow-clerk a closely-folded note and say: "Give it to Dixie."

CHAPTER II.

CONFLICTING CLUES.

ON receiving the note the clerk withdrew, but in the mean time Thad had taken such an inventory of his man that he would have no trouble in recognizing him again.

The detective resumed his seat, and as the banker had not noticed his action in going to the wicket, he did not allude to what had passed in the anteroom.

"Here are a few samples of the anonymous letters I am constantly receiving apprising me of the conduct of Mr. Dawson," began the president, handing the detective a number of letters.

"Dawson?"

"Yes. Alfred Dawson is the name of my cashier."

The detective glanced over the letters, which appeared to all to be in no more than three different handwritings.

They were all pretty much in the same tone, and formed a horrible record of reckless escapades, debauches and heavy losses at the gaming-table.

"This is a pretty black record," observed Thad, at length, "if these letters tell the truth. But, as I said before, jealousy may have prompted the writers to exaggerate, or, what is worse, to invent the stories completely."

"While I admit that they may be exaggerations in some cases," responded the banker, sorrowfully, "I am grieved to know that a good deal of it is only too true."

"You know this?"

"Yes."

"From personal observation?"

"Well, not exactly, but what is its equivalent?"

The banker did not appear inclined to explain what this equivalent was, and the detective did not press him.

"Have you shown these to Dawson?" he finally asked.

"No. It was my intention to have done so, with the hope of extorting a confession from him; but I finally abandoned the idea."

"What was his demeanor when you met him this morning?"

"At first he was extremely nervous and exhibited all the symptoms of a felon discovered in the act of committing a crime, but after a time he assumed the indifferent, dogged air you may have noticed when you came in."

"Have you had any talk with him since the murder and robbery were discovered?"

"Yes. I took him into his office and had a long talk with him. I begged and besought him with tears in my eyes to confess to the crime, promising to do all I could to shield him from the actions of justice, but he sullenly and stoutly adhered to his declaration of innocence."

There was a note of cant in the old man's voice that Thad did not like. Moreover, there was an expression of saintliness which he could not but believe was assumed for the occasion, and the detective's mind and eye once more reverted to the ring on his finger.

He now noticed something which had escaped him before.

The diamond was of peculiar shape. Instead of being smooth or faceted as most stones are, it arose in two sharp points like the back of a camel. A chill ran over the detective. As he recollected it, the scratch on the front of the safe consisted of two distinct circles, as if made with a double-pointed compass!

He might be mistaken in this, however, he mused, and made no allusion to the coincidence, and continued with his catechism.

"You say," he pursued, "that Dawson's wild career dates back about a year?"

"Yes. Perhaps a little more, but about that."

"You are sure that it does not extend to several years?"

"Perfectly."

"What was his record previous to that time?"

"Unimpeachable. Indeed, from the time he came to me, fifteen years ago, down to the time of which I speak, I do not think I ever met a more perfectly upright man. He did not have a vice, that I am positive, and as for honesty and truthfulness, he had not his peer in the city."

"Have you had any reason to doubt the latter at any time within the past year?"

"None whatever. Indeed, even yesterday I would have entrusted him with every dollar of my fortune."

Thad reflected a moment or two, and he recalled the incident in the anteroom and the cashier's allusion to the remarkable name of "Dixie." Of course it was impossible to guess who or what "Dixie" was, but the acute detective at once divined that it was either the real or fictitious name of a woman, and so he asked:

"Among the young man's vices and follies of the past year, Mr. Myers, has he, to your knowledge or in your opinion, been mixed up with any woman? You understand,

I mean the class that generally lead a young man astray and induce him to expend more money than is good for him."

"Not that I am aware of. His anonymous accusers says he has, but beyond that I have no knowledge of the fact. He never impressed me as a man likely to be led off in that way."

"Why?"

"He has never shown any partiality for women's society, for one thing. Up to a year ago he lived with me as a member of my family, and, although my daughter, who is a handsome and accomplished girl (if I do say it myself) was much attached to Alfred and showed him all the encouragement possible, his bearing toward her was uniformly that of the severest and coldest politeness. Indeed, his nature is so cold and unsympathetic that he has never made a dozen friends of either sex since I have known him. Among all the other employees of this establishment he has never warmed toward, or enlisted the friendship of but one man."

"Who is that?" asked Thad eagerly, for his mind reverted to the clerk who had taken the note from Dawson.

"He is a bookkeeper in the general establishment. His name is Thomas Lynch."

"A small man with pale blue eyes and exceedingly red hair, which stands as erect as that of a brush?"

The banker looked at him in surprise.

"Why, yes," he almost gasped. "You have hit his description to a dot. Do you know him?"

"Slightly," replied Thad, not wishing to divulge his secret.

"Yes," pursued the banker, "this man is, and has been the devoted slave of Dawson for years, and for good reason."

Thad pricked his ears.

He imagined he was about to grasp a clue.

"What was his reason?" he asked.

"Why, you see, this Lynch is somewhat of a spendthrift, and always has his salary spent by the time it is earned, and Dawson has accommodated him time and again by allowing him to draw in advance of his salary. On more than one occasion Lynch has got so far behind that there appeared no hope of his ever catching up, when Dawson would come to his relief by canceling his indebtedness to the bank and charging the amount to his own account."

"This showed a generous disposition, at all events," suggested the detective.

"Oh, as to generosity, Dawson was as remarkable for that as he was for honesty and truthfulness. Lynch is not the only one who has been favored by him in this way."

"And yet they never became his friends?"

"No. They were too jealous of his wonderful abilities as a business man and consequent rapid advancement over them. Nearly all of them have been here as long as or longer than he."

"What is the state of Dawson's books at the present time?"

"There is a shortage of cash amounting to about twenty-five hundred dollars."

At first blush Thad was about recording this as a point against the cashier, but before deciding to do so, he asked:

"When were his books examined?"

"They have not been examined lately. This is Dawson's own statement to me a little while ago."

"Then the shortage may be greater when you come to examine his accounts."

"No, I do not anticipate that we shall find them a dollar out of the way, beyond what he says."

Then it was that Thad scored a large point in favor of the cashier.

If he were the villain which circumstances appeared to indicate that he was, would he not have "doctored" his accounts so as to make it appear that he was square with the bank, and then have made up or replaced the amount of his shortage in cash out of the enormous sum he had extracted from the safe?

Having reached this point, the detective arose with the remark, and inquiry:

"I think this is all I desire to ask at present, Mr. Myers, except to inquire what you desire me to do with your cashier."

The banker hesitated and turned a little pale.

"Of course," pursued Thad, "it will be necessary under the circumstances for me to arrest him, but it does not follow that he should be treated as a common felon."

The banker looked up quickly and brightened.

"What do you mean, Mr. Burr?" he demanded, rising.

"Instead of allowing him to go to prison to await trial, he may be kept a prisoner in his own quarters, if you are willing to pay the expense of the guard."

"Do that, then, by all means," advised the banker. "I will bear the necessary expense cheerfully. By the way, I forgot to say that Dawson has a balance to his credit in the bank of something over twenty thousand dollars."

"Another point for the cashier," mused Thad. And by this time he was almost convinced that the young man was innocent.

After a little more reflection, the detective said:

"You have a watchman who remains in on near the bank during the night, of course, Mr. Myers?"

"Yes. We have a watchman who sleeps in the main room of the bank, and another who patrols the front outside."

"Please call the one who sleeps inside."

The president touched an electric annunciator, and in a few moments there was a rap at the door.

The door being opened, the identical messenger who had notified Thad of the murder stepped in.

"Foy, Mr. Burr wishes to ask you a few questions," observed the banker, after reclosing and fastening the door.

"All right, sir," said the young man, who appeared to still retain a good deal of the nervousness which the detective had noticed that morning.

He was a short, stockily-built young man, and appeared to be about eighteen or nineteen years old, and was of undoubted Irish origin.

"You sleep in the main room of the bank, do you, young man?" began the detective.

"Yes, sir," was the trembling reply.

"What time did you retire last night?"

"About half-past ten, sir," rejoined the young man, his voice quavering more than ever, at the same time glancing fearfully at his employer.

"Is that your usual time of getting in?" asked the detective.

"No, sir, I am usually in by ten."

"What kept you out so late last night?"

"I was with Mr. Myers's valet. He was learnin' me to play chess, sir."

"Well, after you retired, did you hear any noise about the building?"

"No, sir."

"Are you sure?"

"Quite sure. If there had been any noise, such as the firin' of a gun or pistol, I would have heard it."

"You are quite sure that you would have awoke?"

"Yes, sir."

"There is no doubt of it," interposed the banker. "I know the boy to be a very light sleeper, so much so that a mouse could hardly run across the floor without waking him."

"Yes, sir," added the boy, "I am a very light sleeper. I always wake when Mr. Myers or Mr. Dawson comes into the bank after hours."

Thad stole a glance at the banker, and saw that he was very red in the face.

"Do they often come in after hours?" ventured the detective.

"No, sir, very seldom," was the boy's simple reply.

Thad was silent for some moments, and then asked one more question:

"How came you to be out with the valet last night? Are you in the habit of spending the evening with him?"

"No, sir. I never met him but once before. He came to me just as I was going to supper and invited me to go to dinner with him. I accepted the invitation, and we went to a *cafe*. After dinner he called for cigars and a chess-board and proposed to learn me to play chess. I got interested, and didn't notice the time until it was after ten. He wanted me to stay still longer, but I wouldn't, and hurried away to the bank."

It was about half-past ten when I reached the bank."

"That will do," said Thad.

When the detective returned to the ante-room, Dawson arose to meet him.

The cashier was calm and self-possessed, although it was evident that he guessed what was in store for him, as he turned his cold gray eyes upon Thad.

The latter lost no time in addressing himself to him.

"Under the circumstances, Mr. Dawson," he began, in his usual gentle, sympathetic voice, "you will not be surprised when I tell you that I will have to place you under arrest."

"It is what I expected," replied the cashier, as calmly as though he had been discussing the affairs of some one else, "and I am ready."

"Mr. Myers signifies his willingness to bear the expense of a special guard," pursued Thad, in the same kindly tone, "and we will therefore not be compelled to subject you to the humiliation of going to jail, but, if you like, you may go to your own lodgings, where you can remain under the surveillance of a guard until such time as your trial comes on. This will save you the mortification of going to prison and relieve the bank of a good deal of the unpleasant notoriety it would otherwise gain."

The cashier shook his head grimly.

"I am extremely sorry not to be able to save the bank the unpleasant notoriety," he answered, "but the circumstances are such that I am not only powerless to obviate it, but also to save myself the mortification of going to prison. I am ready."

"But, my dear sir," protested the banker, stepping forward, "what is to hinder you from going to your own apartments, as the detective suggests?"

"Without wishing to appear insolent, I must answer that that is my own affair, sir. Suffice it to say that it will be neither practicable nor possible for me to go to my lodgings. I am ready."

Thad saw that there was nothing else for him to do, so he conducted the prisoner out of the building, called a cab and had him driven to the Tombs, where, as soon as a warrant could be procured, he was locked up.

Thad then returned to Wall street and took up his position on the opposite side of the street from the bank to watch for the appearance of Thomas Lynch.

Half an hour passed, and the chimes in old Trinity Church at the head of the street were just ringing the hour of noon, when the fiery head of the clerk appeared at the door.

CHAPTER III.

"DIXIE."

BEFORE descending the steps to the sidewalk Lynch glanced up and down the street in an undecided manner. Then he looked straight across the street, and Thad wondered whether the fellow saw him, or whether he suspected that he was being watched.

At all events, after apparently satisfying himself that the coast was clear, the clerk stepped briskly down the stairs and walked off up toward Broadway at a rapid pace.

The detective followed, still keeping on the opposite side of the street, and when the young man reached Broadway, he was not far behind him.

Lynch stopped for a few moments to await a car, but it was not long before Thad saw him enter one of the up-town cable cars, and lost no time in following the clerk, only he remained on the rear platform, to prevent the possibility of the clerk seeing and recognizing him.

Lynch did not appear to suspect that he was being followed, however, for instead of glancing about him in the manner of a man who imagines he is being sought, the clerk took a newspaper from his pocket the instant he got seated and at once appeared to become absorbed in its contents.

Meanwhile the car sped on up the great thoroughfare, the detective standing on the rear platform with his eye ever fixed upon his man, and the latter absorbed in his newspaper and apparently oblivious to all that was going on about him.

Thus matters went on till the car reached

Eleventh street. Thad was beginning to wonder whether Lynch would not forget to get off at the right street, when the young man suddenly looked up and, seeing where he was, sprang up and rushed from the car, without waiting for it to stop.

The detective also got off and, seeing that his man had gone toward Fifth avenue, again chose the opposite side of the street and followed.

The clerk walked at a brisker pace than he had done on leaving the bank, and in a very short time turned into Fifth avenue.

He proceeded along this street but a short distance when he turned into the entrance of a large apartment-house, but before he had time to touch the electric bell Thad was at his side and tapped him on the shoulder.

Lynch looked around quickly, evidently greatly startled, but when he saw who had touched him, his agitation grew to absolute fright and he became livid with terror.

He had seen the detective in the bank that morning and recognized him at once.

"Pardon me, Mr. Lynch," said Thad in his suavest tone, "but I will be compelled to ask you for that note you have in your pocket."

"Note?" gasped the clerk in a tremulous voice.

"Yes, the one which Dawson gave you."

Frightened as the fellow was, his devotion to his friend overcame his terror somewhat, and he made a desperate effort at dissimulation.

"Oh, that?" he cried, with a forced smile. "The fact is that as soon as I read the note, which was in relation to a private matter between Dawson and myself and could concern nobody else, I tore it up and threw the scraps into the waste basket."

"You will excuse me," returned Thad in the politest manner imaginable, "but I happen to know that the note in question did not concern you in any manner whatever, that it was addressed to and intended for another, and that you did not destroy it. So you had better hand it over and save yourself trouble."

The young man was frightened in earnest now, but still he seemed determined to make another effort in behalf of his friend.

"I swear that I haven't got it," he protested. "As true as I live, I destroyed it before leaving the office."

"And I swear that you did nothing of the kind," retorted Thad more sharply than was his wont, "and if you want to save yourself the mortification of arrest and imprisonment, you had better not delay about giving it to me."

The poor fellow was in a sad quandary.

There was something at once so heroic and pathetic in his devotion and self-sacrifice for his friend that the detective was touched, and had he not believed that so much depended upon his recovery of the note, he would have been inclined to have given the matter up, but as matters stood, he did what he had often been compelled to do—steeled his heart against sentiment, and drawing a severe countenance, clutched the young man's arm and shook it rudely.

"Give me that note, I say!" he commanded, "or I shall take you to prison this instant!"

Lynch saw that further resistance was vain, and reluctantly and with a shaking hand, drew forth the note and handed it to the detective with the observation:

"It is no breach of trust, as the note is forced from me."

This was said in a voice so full of sorrow and tenderness that the detective could not avoid pitying him.

Thad glanced at the note, which ran as follows:

"DEAR DIXIE:—

"The bubble has exploded. By the time you read this I will be under arrest for a horrible crime, or rather two crimes, and locked in prison. It matters little that I am innocent; everything is against me, and nothing short of a miracle can save me. Pack up everything you possess and move to some obscure part of the city where they cannot scent you out, and keep shady for the present. It is absolutely essential that the detectives that are on my track do not find you. Do as I say at once, and await developments. Affectionately, AL."

Thad was disappointed.

Instead of finding an important clue, as he had hoped and expected, he had only found a simple, meaningless love-letter.

However, there was no telling but something might grow out of it, so he determined to keep the note, and addressing himself to the clerk, he said:

"I'll save you the trouble of delivering this note, young man. I will deliver it myself. What floor does this lady live on?"

"The second," faltered the clerk in a faint voice, at the same time pointing toward the annunciator he had been on the point of pushing when the detective surprised him.

Thad glanced at the button, and was greatly astonished to read the name "Alfred A. Dawson" in the slot directly over it.

Again turning to the clerk, he said:

"You had better get back to the bank, young man, and lose no time about it, as they will doubtless require your services there. I will attend to this matter to the perfect satisfaction of yourself and your friend Dawson. Good-day."

The clerk turned reluctantly and ruefully and slowly descended the stoop to the sidewalk.

As soon as he was gone, the detective touched the button, and a moment later the door opened.

Ascending a broad and sumptuously-carpeted flight of stairs, he soon reached the second floor. Here he found another annunciator at the side of a door, and touched it.

The door was soon opened, and a brown little maid stood before him.

The detective was at a loss to know whom to ask for, but at length ventured upon this:

"I have a letter here for Miss Dixie."

The pinched little face assumed an amused expression and the owner mutely put out her hand for the note. But instead of giving it to her, the detective continued:

"I come from Mr. Alfred Dawson, and my instructions are to give the note to no one except the lady herself. Is she in?"

The little maid hesitated, and finally rejoined:

"I'll see."

And, turning away, left the door ajar and the detective free to enter if he chose.

He chose to enter, and did so, closing the door behind him.

Once inside (he had merely entered the private hall,) he stood awaiting the return of the maid or approach of the lady for whom the note was intended, he cared not which.

In a very short time a tall, graceful and extremely beautiful woman appeared. Her hair was a rich golden hue, her eyes very large and lustrous and of a deep violet shade, but what attracted the detective's notice most was the striking resemblance the woman bore to Lynch, the clerk.

Could it be, he mused, that she was the young man's sister? If so, he thought, this might be an additional reason for the attachment Lynch bore for Dawson.

These reflections had caused the detective to hesitate about beginning conversation so long that the woman, growing impatient, demanded somewhat petulantly:

"Well, what do you want?"

"I have a note for you," replied Thad, handing her the missive.

She grasped it between her slender thumb and finger, but instead of looking at it at once, kept her eyes fixed upon the detective.

"You say this is from Mr. Dawson?" she asked, in the same ill-natured tone.

"Why did he send it by you, instead of—of a regular messenger or through the post?" she snapped.

"The note itself will explain. As you will see, he is not in a position to avail himself of either of the mediums you allude to."

She dropped her eyes to the note she held in her hand and unfolded it with an impatient jerk.

In an instant she had devoured its contents and again raised her eyes.

"How did he happen to give this to you?" she asked, still testily.

"For the very good reason that he had no other friend at hand," was Thad's cool rejoinder.

"Friend?" she echoed in a shrill cry.

"That was what I said."

Her lips curled scornfully.

"Do you mean to say that you are Alfred's friend, or that he is a friend of yours?" she sneered.

"I do. And it requires no little courage to say it, at a time when very few would care to claim either."

A dark scowl overcast her beautiful face.

"What do you mean?" she demanded angrily.

"The note tells you, I believe."

"It says that he is to be arrested for a great crime, but it does not say what the crime is."

"That I will explain, then. He has been arrested for robbing the bank where he was employed and is now locked up in the Tombs."

"Nonsense!" she almost screeched.

"It will not take you long to ascertain whether I am telling you the truth or not."

"I shall ascertain, and that before very long. But why should he steal? He is rich."

"There is where you are greatly mistaken. He has nothing but his salary, and perhaps something he has managed to save out of it."

"This is all nonsense, I tell you!" she screamed. "He is rich—very rich. He owns the bank or the greater part of it, of which he is head cashier."

"He has told you this?"

"Yes, and I can trust him."

"Then your faith is at fault, for he is, or rather was, nothing but an employee of the bank, and, as I tell you, he is now in the Tombs for the offense of robbing the said bank, and murdering the assistant cashier."

Instead of filling the woman with consternation or overawing her with horror as he had expected, the detective was astonished to hear her burst forth in a peal of wild, hilarious laughter.

"That is too good!" she declared. "I say, my good man, what is your game, anyway?"

"What do you mean?" demanded the detective indignantly.

"What do you expect to gain by this ruse you are attempting to play on me?"

"I do not deem it worth my while to answer your insolent question, and instead of wasting time in asking such silly questions, you had better take the advice of the note, pack up and get out of this as soon as possible."

"I shall do nothing of the kind, for the simple reason that I know Alfred never wrote the note. It is a base forgery, and you shall repent what you have done as soon as I see him."

"When you see him, it will be through the bars of the Tombs, but you had better take my advice and not go near him, as you will only injure his case and probably get yourself locked up in the bargain."

This only had the effect of increasing her impetuous desire to save her lover.

"I care not," she cried vehemently. "I shall save him or go to prison with him."

Thad congratulated himself on one point, at least. He had succeeded in convincing her that Dawson was in prison.

"But, my dear madam," he pleaded, resuming his gentle tone and manner, "be reasonable. What will you gain by such a course? Nothing. You will simply prejudice his case. Remain out of sight as long as possible and allow me to manage your affairs. The first thing the judges and prosecutors will do will be to inquire into his affairs. They will move heaven and earth to discover motives for his theft. If they find you here, surrounded with all the luxuries of a queen, they will set that down as a motive for the robbery."

A remarkable change had suddenly come over the woman.

She had become calm and thoughtful, and the detective could see that she was seriously considering the wisdom of his remarks.

"In other words," she observed in a musing tone, "they will say that Alfred became a thief to gratify my extravagance?"

"Just so. More than that, they may conclude that you are his accomplice."

"Most likely, but they will be unable to prove either that or the charge against Alfred."

"The latter it is not necessary to prove,

It is for him to prove himself innocent of of the charges against him."

The woman turned pale.

There was no mistake about her being thoroughly alarmed now.

"True," she gasped. "What are we to do?"

"Do as the note advises. Pack up and get out at once. Or, what will be better, simply pack your wardrobe and go to some quiet, obscure hotel or suite of furnished rooms and leave your furniture here under lock and key."

She was silent for some moments, and then resumed:

"Yes, that will be the better way. But where shall I go?"

"If you will allow me to suggest, go to a hotel in Brooklyn. Register under an assumed name, pretend, if you like, that you are a widow, and await developments. I will keep you posted."

She regarded him curiously for a full minute, and finally said:

"You do not believe him guilty, do you, sir?"

"Between us, I do not, but this must go no further. Shall I order a carriage for you?"

"If you will be so good."

"With pleasure."

"Thank you. I will be ready in less than half an hour."

Thad returned to the street and calling a carriage, told the driver to call for the lady in half an hour.

He then posted himself across the street where he would not be seen and kept his eye on the house till he saw the woman follow her trunks out of the house, enter the carriage and drive away.

CHAPTER IV.

A LITTLE LIGHT.

COLD and indifferent as had been the bearing which had characterized Dawson up to the time the prison door closed upon him, the moment he found himself alone he suddenly became a changed man.

Stiff and haughty, treating with disdain those about him and scorning to answer the questions of his guards, he had suddenly broken down completely, and now sat on the edge of his cot weeping like a child.

This was his attitude when Thad Burr called upon him a few hours after his incarceration.

Up to that moment, as has been intimated, the detective had been strongly inclined to believe in the cashier's innocence. But when he saw the haughty man in tears and, as it seemed, writhing under the throes of remorse, what could he think?

Certainly no innocent man could have, first, maintained such stolid indifference through such an ordeal as he had passed through. And if he could, such a man would not have collapsed as soon as left to himself.

It was the conduct of the actor who forgets the rigor of a consuming disease while playing his part, and faints on quitting the stage.

On seeing and recognizing the detective, however, a shadow of his self-possession returned to him, and hastily drying his eyes, he arose and approached the grated door.

He forced a faint smile, but his face was very pale and had become remarkably drawn during the short time he had been in prison.

"Well, how do you feel by this time?" asked the detective, by way of beginning conversation.

"Pretty well," replied the ex-cashier with forced cheerfulness.

"Has any change taken place in your mind since last I saw you?" was the next inquiry.

"Change in my mind?" repeated Dawson, with a mystified expression. "I do not understand you."

Thad could not help but think this a part of his former acting, and was determined to break down the barrier of dissimulation at all hazards.

"Come," he retorted sharply, "you know this thing won't go down with me. The sooner you drop your mask and become frank with me the better it will be for you. Everything appears to be against you at present, but you must have some sort of excuse."

"Excuse?" echoed the prisoner dreamily.
 "Yes, for your crime. What is your defense?"

"Defense? I have none."

"Then you admit your guilt?"

For the first time the fellow's face exhibited a shadow of animation.

The color mounted to his cheek and his gray eyes flashed with anger. "No, sir!" he cried vehemently. "A thousand times, no! Though, as you say, appearances are against me, I am innocent!"

"What is the use of keeping this up? You admit that you can prove nothing. What do you expect to gain?"

Dawson's countenance fell.

The expression of defiance and anger melted from his face, and something approaching the despair which Thad noticed a moment before took its place.

"Nothing," he replied in a hopeless tone. "I shall probably be executed for the crime with which I am charged, but they will execute an innocent man."

Thad was dumfounded.

He saw that it was useless to attempt to extort a confession from him, and decided to change his tactics.

"Let us go into the case a little," he began, in a kindly tone. "So far as we have learned so far it seems impossible that any one except yourself and the president could have entered the cash-room and opened the safe. What have you to say? Do you suspect the president?"

Dawson was silent and appeared to be pondering the subject deeply.

"You appear to have overlooked one thing," he finally returned.

"What is that?" asked Thad, eager to grasp the slightest clue.

"You have asserted over and over again that nobody but myself and Mr. Myers could have entered the cash-room. You appear to forget that Meredith, the assistant cashier, was there."

This was a strong point, and the detective could not avoid recognizing it.

"True," he replied, hoping that Dawson might be able to throw some light upon the mystery through this channel, "but how came he there? You admit that he was not in possession of the key."

To the detective's disappointment the cashier only shook his head grimly.

"No, he had no right there," he answered more hopelessly than before; "I have as little knowledge of how he got there as I have of who committed the crime."

"You are positive that the key never left your possession during the period between the time you locked the cash-room door at night and when you unlocked it in the morning?"

"Perfectly."

A new idea occurred to Thad.

"Has the key ever been out of your hands for any length of time, Mr. Dawson, long enough, for instance, for the holder to have a duplicate made from it?"

"No. It has never been out of my possession for a single instant at any time since it was put into my hands by the president three years ago."

Thad's hope, forlorn as it had been, in that direction, perished, but it was quickly supplanted by another.

"I believe I see another chance for you, Mr. Dawson, and in submitting the suggestion I trust you will take me into your confidence and be perfectly frank with me, believing me to be your well-wisher, who is trying to make out the best case possible for you under the circumstances."

The prisoner's face lighted up with a new hope, as he asked eagerly:

"What is it?"

"Where were you between the hours at which you closed the cash-room and opened it again?"

The light faded from his face.

"Alas! I cannot tell!" he replied, despondently.

"Cannot tell where you were?" cried the detective, in surprise and consternation.

"No. Except a very small portion of the time."

"You astonish me."

"Doubtless," he replied, indifferently.

"Where were you for the portion of the time of which you speak?"

Dawson hung his head and remained silent

for some moments. At length he raised his eyes and began in a dreamy tone:

"After leaving the bank I went to Delmonico's to dinner, and there fell in with some jolly friends. We drank considerable wine, after which I remember leaving the place in the company of my friends, but where we went or what we did from that on is as a dream to me. The first I recall after leaving the restaurant is waking up and finding myself in bed in the Coleman House."

Thad felt certain that he had a clue here, and he was not long in following it up.

"Who are these friends you were with?" he inquired. "Where do they live? Let us have them subpoenaed at once. They can doubtless tell where you were all the time, and you will be able to establish an *alibi*."

The cashier shook his head.

"Perhaps I was wrong in calling them friends," he said. "As a matter of fact, with one exception, I never met any of them before last night."

"Who is he?"

"His name is Meredith."

"Meredith?" repeated the detective.

"Not—"

"Yes, a brother of the dead assistant cashier," interrupted Dawson.

"Where is he to be found? Let us subpoena him at once."

"He is now on his way to Europe. Indeed, the dinner was given in his honor, and as his vessel sailed at seven or a little after, he was compelled to leave us before the dinner was fairly over."

"So that he knew nothing of what happened afterward?"

"Naturally."

"And you are unable to recall any of the others?"

"Absolutely. I have been trying to remember their names, but I must have been very much under the influence of liquor, for I cannot even do that, nor can I recall what they looked like."

"Don't you think you would recognize them if you should see them again?"

"It is doubtful. Wine has a strange effect upon me. As soon as I have indulged in a glass or two my vision becomes distorted and unreliable, while my memory is completely destroyed."

Thad realized that there was nothing to be gained in this direction, nevertheless his interview had had the effect of re-establishing his belief in the ex-cashier's innocence.

Dawson had his examination the following day, but nothing could shake his original position of innocence, nor were there any new developments which served to clear up the mystery.

At the inquest held on the body of Meredith every person about the establishment of Dodd, Myers & Co., was examined, but to no purpose. Nothing beyond what had come out of the detective's investigation was learned concerning the murder and robbery.

Thad, however, was not idle.

As soon as the examination of Dawson and Mr. Myers was at an end, and the ex-cashier had been returned to prison, the detective called upon the president again.

He was in his private office, and appeared as calm and placid as though nothing had occurred in his establishment to ruffle his gentle equanimity.

He smiled graciously as the detective entered, turned himself about in his revolving chair, adjusted his gold-rimmed spectacles on his nose, and said:

"Good-day, Mr. Burr. What news?"

"Good-afternoon, Mr. Myers," responded the detective. "What you ask is the very question I was about to put to you. No new developments from the examination of Dawson, I believe?"

The banker shook his head sadly.

"No," he rejoined. "Ah, I fear we have all been grievously mistaken in Alfred. Since hearing his examination I have come to the conclusion that, added to his habitual coldness and austerity, is a deal of cunning."

"You believe him guilty, then?"

"There is not the slightest doubt of it. I was loth to believe it as long as there was a shadow of doubt, but since the examination the last shadow has vanished, and there is nothing left for me but to accept what the evidence shows, that he is a guilty man."

"But *has* the last shadow vanished?" asked the detective in a quiet voice, eyeing the banker closely.

"Undoubtedly," retorted the other stoutly.

As Thad did not reply at once, but continued his scrutiny of the president's countenance, the latter grew a little nervous, and finally asked somewhat testily:

"Don't you think it has?"

"No."

The old man started and turned a little pale.

"What?" he exclaimed, excitedly.

"Listen," said Thad, bending forward and assuming a confidential air. "When I first went to work upon this case, there appeared to me to be an inexplicable mystery—one that it would require the utmost skill and ingenuity of the human mind to unravel. After working on it something over twenty-four hours, I have come to the conclusion that there is still a mystery, but one which may and will soon be made clear."

The banker sat gazing at the detective like one transfixed.

He appeared to have lost the power of speech.

"I now begin to see that there are possibilities of which I did not dream at first; that there are ways and means by which the crime might have been perpetrated without involving either Mr. Dawson or yourself."

"You do not believe my cashier guilty, then?"

"It is not for me to say what I do or do not believe, Mr. Myers. It is enough for me to say that neither he nor yourself are necessarily guilty."

The banker grew very red.

"What do you mean, sir?" he snorted.

"Do you mean to insinuate that there is as much chance of my being guilty as my cashier?"

"I make no insinuations, nor do I accuse any one. To the unbiased observer, however, there would appear to be as much evidence against one as the other, and in neither case does there appear to be a motive. There certainly could have been no motive for you to have committed the crime—"

"Certainly not," interrupted the banker savagely. "What motive could any one attribute to me?"

"That same may be asked regarding your cashier. What motive could he have had?"

"Extravagance, the need of money to pay his debts—gambling debts, as like as not."

"But you admitted to me yesterday that he has a balance in the bank of something like twenty thousand dollars. Is it likely that a man would steal and commit murder, for the sake of covering his crime, probably, while he had that amount of money at his command?"

This was a poser, and the banker did not attempt to reply.

"Of course," pursued the detective, "you are as positive of the innocence of any member of your own family as you are of your own innocence, Mr. Myers?"

"Certainly," answered the banker bluntly.

"Why do you ask?"

"You always carry the key to the cash-room upon your person, I presume?" continued Thad, disregarding the other's question.

"Usually. But when I do occasionally leave it at home I lock it up in the drawer of my secretary where no one could possibly get at it."

"Where were you on the night of the murder and robbery?"

"I went to the theater with my wife and daughter."

"Had you the key in your pocket then?"

"No, sir, it was in the drawer of the secretary."

"You say the safe is locked with a combination or word; do you ever tell this word to any one else?"

"Not a living soul."

"Who generally suggests the word?"

"My cashier."

"How often is it changed?"

"Every few days. Sometimes longer, sometimes shorter. It had just been changed the day before the robbery."

"What was the word?"

"A very peculiar one, and one I shall

never forget. It was 'D-i-x-i-e,' he said, spelling the word.

Thad started at the sound of the name, but said nothing.

"I believe Dawson was in the habit of associating with a man by the name of Meredith, a brother of the murdered assistant cashier," pursued the detective, varying the subject. "Did you ever hear of him?"

It was now the banker's turn to start, and to grow very nervous.

"I should say I did," he replied. "He is my nephew, but a sharper, and as great a scoundrel as ever escaped the gallows!"

"Dawson was with him the night of the murder and robbery."

"He was?" exclaimed the banker. "Where is Meredith now?"

"On his way to Europe."

CHAPTER V.

A FOUL CONSPIRACY.

WHEN, on leaving the banker, Thad visited Dawson again in his cell he found that strange young man in an entirely different state of mind from what he had ever seen him theretofore.

A complete change had come over him.

He exhibited neither the cold indifference so characteristic of him, nor was he in tears. He showed the defiant, aggressive spirit of one who in whose heart the bitter sting of conscious wrong is rankling and who thirsts for vengeance.

His usually pale face was flushed with anger and his cold gray eye flashed with pent-up fury. He was pacing the floor of his cell when Thad approached like a caged lion, and the moment he caught sight of the detective he rushed up to the grated door to meet him, as though he had something weighty to impart.

"I am glad you have come, Mr. Burr," he began. "I have something of importance to say to you."

"I shall be glad to hear it, Mr. Dawson," rejoined the detective in his usual kindly voice.

What was he going to tell? mused the detective. Could it be that he had finally decided to make a confession? No, it could not be that. He did not act like a man in a penitent mood.

He was not long in suspense.

"I have just received a visit from my father," pursued the prisoner, "and he, like all the rest, believes me guilty. This has had the effect of goading me up to a frenzy that I did not believe possible with me, and I have decided to make certain disclosures that I had hitherto thought to keep inviolate."

"Yes?" responded the detective calmly.

Now the confession was coming, thought Thad.

"In the first place, I want to tell you that I believe myself to be the victim of a foul conspiracy."

"Whom do you suspect as the conspirators?"

"The Myers family."

"Then you believe the president or some of his family are guilty of the crime with which you are charged?"

"I do."

"What leads you to this belief?"

"It is a long story. You may have heard Mr. Myers mention the fact that at one time I paid court to his daughter?"

"He said something about his daughter having a high regard for you, but the president did not believe you ever thought of her."

"He knew better. He knew that I loved her devotedly, and that through the foul slanders of some of my enemies she cast me off. He knows also that when she learned that her suspicions had been groundless, and she sought a reconciliation, my proud spirit forbade me to renew our severed relations, and he is not a stranger to the fact that Estelle had sworn to ruin me if it cost her her life."

"Then you think that she is at the bottom of it?"

"Not exactly. But others who have vengeance to wreak upon me for fancied wrongs have made her alleged wrongs an excuse for attempting to effect my ruin."

"Whom do you suspect to be the guilty parties?"

"One of them—the ringleader—is Clarence Meredith."

"What cause has he for desiring to wrong you?"

"Several. In the first place, when he was a trusted clerk in the bank, and just as he was expecting to be promoted to the position which George, his brother, after received—assistant cashier, I discovered that he was stealing from the bank. I did not report the matter to his uncle, the president, but informed him of my discovery and made the shortage good out of my own savings. Nevertheless, his uncle discovered his dishonesty through some of the other clerks and discharged him. He imagined for a long time that I had betrayed him, and even when he was convinced that I had not, he never forgave me because I did not intercede for him and get him restored. Another thing he holds against me, is the fact that a certain woman who had been his mistress left him and took up with me."

"This woman goes by the name of 'Dixie,' does she not?"

This was a surprise to Dawson, for he had imagined that Dixie had got out of the way before the detective could have a chance of discovering her existence.

"Yes," he finally admitted, "that is the woman. You have met her?"

"I have."

"Where?"

"At your lodgings on Fifth avenue."

Dawson turned pale, and appeared to lose something of his courage.

"Then you saw the style in which I kept her, and are convinced more than ever that I am guilty, because there was a reason for my extravagance?" he said, despondently.

"Mr. Dawson, I have never been convinced of your guilt," returned Thad, in a sympathetic voice.

The young man's face lighted up with an expression of hope such as Thad had never witnessed there before.

"Oh, thank you, sir!" he exclaimed, rapturously, "a thousand thanks for that word of encouragement! It is the first I have heard since my incarceration. You do not know what happiness you have given me by that one word of kindness."

"I not only believe in your innocence myself," pursued Thad, "but I believe that I shall soon be able to convince others of the same thing, if you will repose perfect confidence in me and confide all you know of this case to my keeping."

"If you do, Mr. Burr," cried the young man, beside himself with joy, "you shall never want a friend, and all I have in the world is yours!"

"I shall do my best, depend upon that."

"Oh, thank you, sir!"

And then suddenly the recollection of his alleged wrongs appeared to burst upon him, his temper got the best of him and he broke forth in a storm of invective against his persecutors.

He paced wildly up and down his cell, his face livid with rage and his eyes fairly flashing fire, while he poured forth a perfect volley of curses upon his enemies in general and the Myers family in particular.

"Once let me get out of here," he would say, "let me get my hands free, and I shall devote the remainder of my life to wreaking a terrible vengeance upon them, and none of them shall be spared!"

Allowing him to become calm again, which he soon did, Thad addressed him.

"I should make no threats if I were you," he remonstrated in a kindly tone. "It will do no good, and may do our cause an injury. First let us see what we can do toward getting out, and in so doing, we will most likely inculcate your enemies, in which case they will be more severely punished than you could do, if you devoted your lifetime."

"You are right, Mr. Burr," admitted the young man, growing calm, "I am foolish and weak to allow my passion to get the better of my judgment in this way, but the thoughts of my wrongs and what I have suffered at the hands of my persecutors drives me almost mad at times."

"But you must try to forget this and think only of ways and means by which you can overcome your difficulties."

"I will try, sir," he said resignedly.

"That is right. Now I want to ask you something in regard to this woman they call 'Dixie'. What is her right name?"

Dawson hesitated, and the color mounted to his cheek.

"Leonora Wayne," he finally faltered.

"You are sure that is her true name?" said the detective doubtfully.

"I can only say that that is the name she gave me" was the timid reply.

"Where is she from?"

"Really, I do not know. You see I have so little interest in other people's affairs—"

"Do you not know that she is the sister of your devoted friend Lynch?" interrupted Thad.

"God forbid!" cried the young man, warmly, but the detective was at a loss to know which of the two Dawson considered would be disparaged by the relationship.

"You have never heard either of them say that such was the case, then?"

"No, sir, I never did, and what is more, the thing never occurred to me."

"Have you never noticed a strong resemblance between them?"

"It never occurred to me."

"Have you ever seen them together?"

"No, not exactly. Lynch has been at my house, and Dixie has sometimes been present, but I do not remember that they ever took any special interest in each other."

"You never noticed any signs of familiarity, such as might be expected between a brother and sister?"

"Never."

"What kind of a woman is she? I mean in the matter of fidelity. Do you believe she is true to you?"

"I believe she is, although I have never given the matter a thought. She might have a dozen lovers, so that they never came in my way, and I would never suspect anything. You see it is not in my nature to be jealous. That weakness is reserved for ardent people. It is not my disposition to love very strongly, and consequently I am not apt to be jealous of the object of my adoration, or fancy it would probably be better to call it."

"But aside from the matter of affection, do you believe her capable of betraying you; in other words, of playing into the hands of or aiding your enemies?"

"No, I do not believe her capable of this. Indeed, I do not believe her possessed of sufficient cunning for anything of the kind. She is the most simple-minded creature in the world. She has not a single thought above dress and flashy jewelry. The fact of her possessing a soul I am positive never entered her silly little head in the whole course of her life."

"This convinces me more than anything else that she will do to watch," rejoined the detective. "Depend upon it, she is working in the interest of your enemies."

"I do not believe it," stoutly maintained Dawson.

"You intimated during our talk yesterday that she had formerly been intimate with Meredith."

"So she was."

"Have you any idea why she broke with him?"

"None, except that she got tired of him."

"Have you been on friendly terms with Meredith since she went to live with you?"

"Lately I have. He came to me some six months ago and professed friendship and, although I have never had any great liking for the fellow, I have treated him civilly since that time."

"Do you think it just possible that her breaking off with him in the first place and taking up with you, of his pretended enmity and later protestation of friendship toward you, are all a ruse for the purpose of getting you into their power?"

The young man opened his eyes in astonishment.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, "there might be something in that, though it never occurred to me before. I know that Meredith is capable of any sort of intrigue and villainy. It may be as you suggest."

"I think so, and shall work upon that hypothesis."

It was about seven o'clock in the evening when Thad left the Tombs, and stopping long enough to snatch a bite to eat at the first restaurant he came to, he took

a cab and drove over to the Brooklyn hotel.

He had some difficulty in getting the clerk to remember a lady who had registered there two days before under the name of "Mrs. Smith of Syracuse," but he finally succeeded, only to learn, however, that she had stopped one day and night, and then gone.

There had been several policemen there to see her, the clerk said, and that was the probable cause of her leaving. He did not know where she had gone.

Thad was in despair.

And then it occurred to the clerk to question the bell-boys, and one of them was found who knew the lady's address. She had expected a package and, instead of leaving her address at the office, which she knew would enable the police to find her, she had simply given it to this boy, with the offer of a good reward if he would deliver the package without saying anything about it. He had watched for the arrival of the package, and when it finally came (that same afternoon) he had taken it surreptitiously to the number she had given him, but it was only to discover that the was out, and, although he had called twice since, she was always out, and that was the reason that he was willing to divulge her secret.

A small fee was sufficient to induce the boy to conduct the detective to the house, which was on Hicks street, only a few doors from Orange, and proved to be a private boarding-house.

Before going, however, he had the boy give him the package intended for the lady, and under pretense of being extremely solicitous as to whether his friend Mrs. Smith had got the goods she had ordered, the detective opened the parcel.

To his surprise, it contained a simple calico dress, evidently purchased at some second-hand dealer's, and a pair of coarse shoes and a sun-bonnet.

"Aha," mused Thad, "she is up to some deviltry, and I guess I was not far wrong in my estimate of her character."

When they were near the boarding-house Thad returned the bundle to the boy and instructed him to give it to the landlady with instructions to give it to Mrs. Smith.

The boy did as directed, after which the detective rung the bell.

To his surprise and delight the landlady, who answered the bell in person, was a Mrs. Wright, a widow, and an old acquaintance of his.

After a season devoted to mutual greeting, Thad took the landlady into his confidence, and told her all about the woman who was stopping at her house.

As soon as Mrs. Wright learned the character of the woman she declared that she would put her out of the house at once, but Thad remonstrated with her.

"Let her remain, by all means," he pleaded. "You can keep a close watch on her, and there is no telling but I may be able to unravel this great mystery in that way. If I do, Mrs. Wright," he went on, waxing confidential, "you shall be well paid for your part in the work."

Like most landladies, she was not above turning an honest penny, and her heart was won at once.

"Certainly, Mr. Burr," she said, "if it is going to be of any use to you, she shall stay here as long as she likes, and she'll never make a move that I won't see."

Thad thought he could trust her for that.

"Has she any visitors?" he asked.

"No, sir," she replied. "That is, there has been but one person here to see her, and then she was out. In fact, she is nearly always out, and that is one reason I did not like her actions."

"What sort of a looking person was this, Mrs. Wright?"

"A little red-headed fellow."

"Ah," mused Thad, "Dawson's friend Lynch."

"Is she at home now?" he asked.

"Yes, sir, she went up-stairs five minutes before you came. A boy left a bundle here for her, and I gave her that and some letters, and then she went up to her room. Hist! Here she comes now!"

"Hide me away, quick!" cried Thad.

The landlady pushed him into a closet just as the woman entered.

CHAPTER VI.

A MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE.

FORTUNATELY it was very dark in the corner where the closet was located, and any one entering the room could scarcely have seen a person standing outside, much less concealed within its dark recesses.

Thad, realizing this fact, took advantage of it and did not close the door entirely, but left a small crack through which he had a good view of the room outside.

When Dixie entered the room she was compelled to come directly toward him and the light shining squarely in her face, he could trace every lineament of it.

He was surprised at the change which had come over the woman in the short space of time since he had seen her.

Her face, once so rosy and oval, was pale, haggard and drawn, and her eyes, so bright and merry but two days before, were dull and heavy and surrounded by dark rings. Moreover, they showed traces of weeping and were even now wet with tears.

"Good evening, Mrs. Wright," she said in a half-sobbing tone. "I have no more than got in, and now I am compelled to go out again."

As she spoke she tapped a letter which she held in her hand, by which Thad understood that her going out was, in response to the letter's contents.

"Going out again?" cried the landlady in a motherly voice. "Why, child, you'll be sick."

"I am sick now," responded the young woman. "My head aches as though it would burst, but I must go."

Thad was on the tiptoe of eagerness.

Would the landlady have forethought enough to ask her where she was going? And if she had, would the girl place sufficient confidence in her to tell her?

"I just wouldn't go if I was you," remonstrated the landlady. "Go right back up stairs and go to bed."

"Oh, if I only could," sighed the girl, with a broken sob. "But it is impossible. I have just received a letter from my husband's dearest friend saying that I must meet a certain gentleman who is to help my husband out of his trouble, and it will not do for me to disappoint him, for so much depends upon it."

"Her husband, eh?" thought Thad. "This does not look much like she intends betraying him."

"Of course," responded the landlady, sympathetically, "if you must go, you must, and a wife should never stop at anything to help her husband out of trouble, but I do hope you haven't to go far."

Thad could not help inwardly applauding the landlady for her tact in asking the question.

"That is the worst of it," replied the girl. "The gentleman whom I am to meet is to come in from the West, and Mr. Lynch wants me to meet him at the Grand Central depot at ten o'clock."

"Do you know who this gentleman is, my child?"

"That is what worries me. I do not so much as know his name, and so far as I know, I never saw or heard of him."

"This is strange, and I am very sorry you have to go to meet him, but I s'pose you must, but get back as early as you can, my child."

"Oh, yes, I shall not stay out any later than I am compelled to, for I am just tired out. Good-night, Mrs. Wright."

"Good-night, my child."

And the girl left the room.

As soon as Thad heard the front door close he was out of the closet.

The landlady met him with a bland smile.

"Well, you are a diplomatist, Mrs. Wright!" he declared, grasping her hand. "I could not have managed it better myself."

"Oh I know how to get around these critters," replied the landlady, with an expression of conscious superiority. "They have to be very cute to get ahead of Nancy Wright, if I do say it myself."

"I believe you, Mrs. Wright. But I must be off."

"Going to follow her, Mr. Burr?"

"Certainly. I could never afford to lose this opportunity."

And stepping in front of a looking-glass,

he proceeded to make himself up an entirely different individual.

A heavy black beard and shaggy black eyebrows metamorphosed his face to such an extent that even the landlady would not have recognized him.

But he was not satisfied with this.

A close-cropped black wig which came low upon his forehead, gave him the appearance of a person of low mental caliber, and when this was adjusted he asked the landlady for a suit of old clothes, which he knew were always to be found around her house, as some of her boarders were common laborers.

"I've got just the thing for you," she remarked with a knowing wink, and she left the room.

A moment later she returned, bringing a bundle of clothing, which Thad found on opening to be a suit of the roughest raiment imaginable.

"Just the thing," he exclaimed, as he proceeded to divest himself of his coat and vest.

Mrs. Wright was too fond of gossip to lose the opportunity of a talk by leaving the room while he was dressing, so she merely turned her back and kept her tongue wagging like the clapper of a bell.

"I wonder what she's up to now," she prattled on.

"I cannot guess," rejoined the detective, "although I shouldn't imagine by her talk that she was going to do anything to prejudice her lover."

"One wouldn't think so, but these women are so dreadfully deceitful that you can never tell what they are up to. All her palaver and sheddin' of tears and all that sort of thing, may have been a blind to throw me off the track, though I can't imagine why she should think I was against her in any way."

"It sounded a little odd to you and me, who know, to hear her speak of her husband, eh, Mrs. Wright?"

"The ideal!" sneered the landlady. "But that is the way of these women. They're always ready with their make-believes and puttin's-on. You never see one that don't talk about her husband and her mother and all that sort of thing, when a body can't look at them without readin' them through and through. But they have to be almighty cute to get ahead of old Nancy Wright, if I do say it myself."

By this time the detective was through with his strange toilet, and bidding the landlady a hasty good-night, hurried out of the house.

At Fulton street he hailed a cab, and although the driver looked at him in his uncouth attire with a contemptuous air, the exchange of a liberal fare had the desired effect, and the detective climbed in and was soon speeding in the direction of the great bridge.

A half hour later he emerged from the cab at the corner of Forty-second street and Vanderbilt avenue, and entered the Grand Central Depot.

The usual throng surged through the great building, and Thad had some difficulty in locating the woman, but he finally caught sight of her.

She was sitting on one of the long benches that traverse the waiting-room of the great depot, and but for her clothing, the detective would never have recognized her, for her face was covered with a veil.

"How does she expect a stranger coming into this place to recognize her?" mused Thad.

And then it occurred to him that she had been instructed by her correspondent to watch for some signal which the new comer would use. Or perhaps she wore some badge by which he would recognize her.

But he examined her in vain for any badge.

There was absolutely nothing out of the common about her apparel, which consisted of a simple black walking-dress and a black derby hat, over which was drawn the veil.

The girl was evidently very nervous, for she kept shifting from one side to another and starting hysterically at the approach of every new-comer.

The great clock in the depot showed that it wanted but a few minutes of ten, and as the hour of the appointment grew nearer, the woman appeared to wax more nervous.

At length she seemed unable to bear the suspense any longer, and arose from her seat.

For the space of several minutes she paced uneasily up and down the long room.

Finally the clock struck the hour of ten, and her eyes turned to the great dial.

Almost at the same instant a tall man with a pointed beard entered the station from one of the Vanderbilt avenue entrances and hurried directly to the girl as though he had known her all her life.

It was a puzzle to the detective how he recognized her, for so far as he could discover no signal passed between them.

Dixie did not notice his approach until he was within a few feet of her, and came face to face just as she had turned in her walk, and he put out his hand.

The girl started violently, but finally took his hand timidly.

A few words passed between them which Thad was unable to hear from where he stood, and then the couple walked to one of the benches and sat down.

The detective now took the opportunity of moving closer to where they sat, with the hope of overhearing what they said.

Fortunately the seat at their back was unoccupied, and he took it.

Dixie and the stranger were engaged in earnest conversation, but in so low a tone that the detective could only catch a word here and there. The man appeared to be trying to persuade her to do something she was unwilling to consent to.

The man's voice was low and earnest and always kindly, and the girl's sometimes betrayed deep emotion, at other times the tone of half sobbing which the detective had noticed when she was talking to the landlady would stifle her utterance, and again she spoke in a cheerful voice as though agreeable to what he was proposing.

At such times Thad would steal a glance at her face, and as she had now removed her veil, he could see that her countenance was radiant with smiles.

Finally her sadness seemed to have all vanished and she gave vent to occasional subdued ripples of laughter.

At length the stranger spoke in a more distinct voice, and Thad heard him say:

"Well, it is agreed then that you shall go, is it?"

The girl hesitated a moment, and then replied:

"Yes, I presume that will be the best thing to do. Do you think there is any chance of his finding me there?"

"Not in the least. However, leave that to me. I will see that no one molests you until the thing is fixed."

After another silence Dixie said:

"Well, I believe I can trust you. I do not know you, but I know that he is my friend."

The tall man immediately arose and the girl followed his example.

Thad took occasion to study the stranger's features now, and he saw that he was a strikingly handsome, refined-looking man, with dark hair and a pointed beard of the same hue, and extremely fine dark eyes, the lids of which were fringed with very long silken lashes. His mouth was also fine, and when he smiled, as he frequently did, he exhibited an unusually beautiful set of white teeth.

"I won't forget that face," thought the detective, "and before many hours elapse I will know who the man is."

The tall man gallantly gave his arm to Dixie and they left the station.

When they reached the sidewalk, on the Vanderbilt avenue side, Thad was not far behind them, but the man had evidently prepared in advance for an emergency, for a carriage was standing at the curb, into which he and the woman lost no time in climbing, and before the detective had time to think a second time they had driven off at a rapid pace.

Thad was not to be outdone, however, and as hacks were in abundance about the depot, he was not long in securing one, and put after the retreating vehicle.

As was his wont in such cases, the detective had slipped a double fare into the driver's hand with the instruction to keep the fugitive carriage in sight, no matter

where it went, and the driver was faithful to his charge.

The fugitives' vehicle whirled along Forty-second street toward the western side of the city until it reached Broadway and turned up-town.

It continued in this direction until it reached Fiftieth street, and again turned west.

Continuing along Fiftieth street until it arrived about the middle of the second block from Broadway, the carriage stopped in front of a large, gloomy-looking building, in which there was no sign of life. Not a light appeared at any of the windows, and as the street lights were extremely dim in this vicinity, scarcely more than the outline of the carriage could be discerned in the gloom.

Ordering his driver to pull up half a dozen doors away from where the other carriage had stopped, Thad alighted and crept along in the gloom until he was within a few yards of the stranger's carriage, and awaited developments.

The driver had already jumped down from his box and was just ascending the stoop of the house.

Thad concealed himself in the dark corner of a stoop and waited.

The hackman rung the bell and the door of the house was finally opened by some one to whom the hackman handed a package.

This much the detective could make out, but what the nature of the package was, or whether the person who had opened the door was a man or woman, he could only surmise.

The occupants of the carriage did not alight, and as the driver stood for a long time talking to the person at the door, Thad became uneasy, and determined upon a bold stroke.

Somehow he suspected that there was something wrong, and he approached still nearer the carriage.

Putting his ear against the side of the door on the opposite side from the curb, he listened, but no sound came to him.

What could it mean?

A horrible suspicion seized him.

What if the stranger had taken this opportunity to murder the girl, and was awaiting the arrival of some one from the house to help him remove her dead body from the carriage?

He could not have told himself how he happened to think of such a thing, but the thought had come to him as he stood there in the dark beside the carriage.

He knew that such things were often done, and he knew also that if there was any truth in Dawson's declaration that there was a plot to ruin him on foot, the plotters would stop at nothing.

If Dawson was innocent of the crime charged against him, there was a possibility of the girl possessing some knowledge that would lead to the establishment of it.

If such was the case, his enemies probably knew it, and would not hesitate to put her out of the way.

Still the detective waited, and still no sound came from the interior of the carriage, and still the hackman continued to talk at the top of the stoop.

Finally he could restrain his impatience no longer.

He would discover the truth at all hazards.

He stepped to the other side of the carriage and looked up toward the house.

At that moment the door closed and the hackman started to descend the stoop.

There was no time to be lost.

Thad threw open the door of the carriage.

It was empty!

CHAPTER VII.

THE GHOST WITNESS.

THAD had no more than made the discovery that the pair whom he had been vainly following had disappeared, when the coachman descended the stoop and was on the point of mounting his box. The detective stepped to the side of the coach and accosted him.

The fellow looked up, astonished, when he caught sight of the detective standing there, so much so, that Thad was compelled to repeat his question before receiving any answer.

"What became of the couple you drove over from the station?" was Thad's demand.

"Couple?" echoed the other, as if in a quandary to know just what the detective meant.

"Yes, the man and woman who entered your hack at the Grand Central Depot."

This question appeared to amuse the fellow very much, and he laughed uproariously.

"I didn't drive no couple over," he replied, still laughing.

"A couple entered your hack," persisted Thad.

"I guess not."

Meanwhile the coachman had climbed upon his box and gathered up his reins.

"I tell you they did," cried the detective.

"Well, then, where are they? Do you see 'em inside?" laughed the driver, as he gave his team the lash and dashed away.

Thad was perplexed.

What could have become of Dixie and her strange escort?

Was it possible that they had merely got into the carriage on one side, and immediately climbed out on the other, and that without the knowledge of the driver?

Thad returned to his cab and directed the driver to drive him back to Brooklyn.

It was about midnight when he arrived, and the landlady was anxiously awaiting his return.

Dixie had not yet returned, and Mrs. Wright appeared to be very uneasy about her.

When Thad related the account of his adventure, the landlady was greatly astonished and also indignant at the little woman's conduct.

"I knew there was something wrong about the hussy the first time I set eyes on her," she declared. "In my opinion she knows more about the crime than she would care to tell."

"You may be right, Mrs. Wright," assented the detective, "but we shouldn't be too ready to judge. Perhaps she has been lured away by these people who have some motive in getting her out of the way."

"I don't believe it. My opinion is that all her talk about getting the letter from her husband's friend asking her to meet a stranger was just made up as an excuse to get away."

"But she did not appear to know the man whom she met in the depot," objected the detective.

"All for effect, I s'pose."

"I do not see what object she could have had. She could not have known that she was being followed."

"Still, she did not know but she might be. She was always in dread of being followed. And that is one thing that makes me think she is no better than she ought to be."

"Her conduct to-night certainly is against her, unless it turns out that she is the victim of a villainous plot, as I more than half believe, in spite of appearances."

But the landlady still shook her head doubtfully.

"If there is any plot," she maintained, "depend upon it, she is at the bottom of it."

They talked on for some time, and it was long after midnight, but still the girl had not returned.

Thad did not like to leave the house as long as there was any hope of her returning, and by way of killing time, had removed his false beard and other disguise.

At length Mrs. Wright thought she heard a noise at the front of the house, and went to the door.

Nobody was there, and no sound could be heard as of any one approaching or retreating from the house.

The detective followed her to the door, and stood with her peering out into the darkness. The night was intensely dark and a heavy rain was falling.

"We'll see nothing of the little hussy to-night," observed the landlady, as she finally closed the door. "Mind my words."

Thad made no reply, and as he started thoughtfully along the hall, toward the sitting-room, his quick ear caught what appeared to be the sound of footsteps on the floor overhead.

He stopped and glanced back at the land-

lady, who was at his heels with a lamp in her hands.

"Who is up-stairs?" he asked quickly.

"Nobody but an old lady. Why do you ask?"

"There is some one walking up there, and I do not believe it is an old lady, either."

They both listened, but as nothing more could be heard, Mrs. Wright attributed the noise he had heard to the wind, or to the detective's imagination.

Thad, however, was not satisfied that it was either, and, snatching the lamp from her hand, crept softly up the stairs.

Reaching the floor above, he stopped to listen, but all was quiet. He moved noiselessly along the hall till he reached a chamber door.

Here he stopped and put his ear to the door. At first no sound reached him, but after a moment or two the unmistakable sound of footsteps was heard, and the detective's acute perception told him that it was not the footsteps of a woman.

Turning back toward the head of the stairs, he found that the landlady had followed him, and to her he whispered his discovery.

"Which room?" she asked, looking very grave.

"The last one to the right," he replied.

The landlady turned pale.

"That is her room," she whispered.

"Well, there is somebody in there now. Is there any way to enter the room except by this door?"

"No."

Thad tiptoed back to the door and tried the knob.

The door was locked, and at the same time he heard hasty footsteps inside, as though the occupant of the room were trying to make his escape.

What could it mean?

It was impossible that the intruder could have made his way up-stairs without either the landlady or the detective hearing him.

Again he turned to Mrs. Wright.

"Have you a duplicate key to this door?" he asked.

"Yes," she replied, nervously selecting a key from a bunch she took from her pocket. "But I'm afraid the door's locked on the inside and the other key in the lock."

Thad took the key from her and attempted to put into the lock. The landlady's prediction was correct. The other key was in the lock and prevented him from putting his in.

Without waiting for further ceremony, he threw his weight against the door. The frail lock yielded and the door flew open, but as he entered the room a gust of wind from an open window blew out the lamp he carried and left the room in darkness.

Just at that moment, however, a flash of lightning revealed the figure of a man on the point of making his escape from the window.

The next instant as the room fell into darkness again, Thad noticed the smoldering wick of a candle which had evidently been blown out by the wind.

With remarkable quickness he whipped out a match, raked it on his trousers and applied the flame to the still smoking wick, and as the flame flared up, snatched up the candlestick and rushed to the window.

Putting the light outside the open window, he saw a man hastening down a ladder which had been placed against the side of the house.

The next instant the light was blown out, but Thad had seen enough to note that the fellow was muffled up in a shabby old coat and comforter, and wore an oil-skin covered hat similar to that worn by coachmen in stormy weather, but in spite of this uncouth make-up, which was evidently affected as a disguise, Thad was able to make a mental note of the man's features so that he would have no difficulty in recognizing him again.

This had all taken place in the fraction of a minute, and the detective's next move was to leave the window and hasten down-stairs as quickly as possible.

Scarcely another minute elapsed before he was at the front door, and this time prepared for action.

He had taken the precaution on his way down-stairs to draw his revolver and held it ready for use at a moment's notice.

But quickly as he had made the descent, by

the time he got outside he heard the sound of wheels rolling away from the curb, which he reached in time to catch a shadowy glimpse of a close carriage as it vanished in the darkness.

Thad now saw that he had made a mistake in not holding the cab in which he had returned from New York in readiness, in case he might need it.

However, he could tell by the sound that the carriage had gone toward the river, and lost no time in following it on foot.

Of course the carriage was not long in distancing him, but thinking it might proceed to the ferry, judging from the direction it had gone, he kept on in that course and soon reached Fulton Ferry.

A boat was on the point of shoving off, and he hurried through the gate and got aboard of her, but it did not take him long to see that he had made a mistake in supposing the carriage would come that way, for there was no vehicle of any kind on the boat. There was no going back now, however, and the detective contented himself with crossing over to the New York side, and when the boat landed he took it into his head to walk down to Wall street and take a look about the scene of the late tragedy.

A steady, sullen rain was falling and the detective was pretty well drenched by the time he reached the bank, but that did not disturb him in the least.

The bank was in darkness with the exception of the single light which is kept burning in the corridor, and everything was deathly still about the place.

After surveying the premises for some moments with no other result than to find that they were apparently deserted. Thad turned away and was about to cross the street when the watchman came along, eyed the detective suspiciously and asked him what he was doing there.

Thad did not feel inclined to explain matters to him, and merely replied that he was passing through the street and chanced to stop for a second. After which, and while the watchman was still scowling darkly at him, he turned upon his heel and strode across the street.

It had been his intention to take his stand there for a few moments for the purpose of watching the bank, but the watchman still kept an eye upon him, so he strolled off toward Broadway, and when he had turned the corner stopped long enough in the recess of a doorway to allow the watchman to think he had gone. He then returned to a point directly opposite the bank and took up his stand.

The watchman had strolled away and everything was quiet about the bank as ever, and so it remained for a long time, nothing occurring to attract his attention.

Still he could not make up his mind to leave the place or relax his vigilance.

The night had pretty well advanced toward morning and still the detective's eye remained fixed upon the front of the bank.

At length he became aware that some one was moving about inside the main room.

He was not certain of this at first and did not know but it might be imagination.

He looked up and down the street for the watchman, but he was nowhere to be seen.

Finally Thad crossed the street and looked in through the plate-glass windows. The whole interior was plainly visible to him, but there was no sign of any one in the bank.

He could see the cot of the inside watchman, and although it was partially screened, he could discern that the young man occupied it.

Thad felt a little cheap. He realized that he had been deceived by some shadow, or at least believed he had, and was about turning away again, when the unmistakable shadow of a man suddenly shot out of the gloom and fell across the floor.

The person could not be seen, from the fact that he was concealed behind a desk, but he was standing in such a position that the light threw his shadow out on the floor in bold relief.

There could be no doubt of it.

It was in vain that the detective tried to convince himself that it was the shadow of some bust or statue; as he watched it, the shadow moved and quivered as though the substance was engaged in doing something which did not require him to move out of

his tracks but caused his body to sway perceptibly.

Thad was just pondering what to do, when he was suddenly startled by some one laying a hand upon his arm, and, looking around, saw the watchman.

The fellow scowled more than ever, and growled:

"Now, sor, what air yez doin' here again? I'll have to run yez in if yez don't mosey moighty loively."

"Don't make an ass of yourself, my good man," replied Thad. "Look at that man in there!"

"The only mon I see's here, an' he'll be in the station purty soon if he isn't careful!" growled the watchman.

"Is it possible you don't know me, you absurd old fool!" cried the detective, losing his patience.

"No, sor, I don't know yez," retorted the fellow, studying Thad's face suspiciously. "but I suspects that yez air a crook, and if yez don't move along, I'll arrest you."

"Well, sir, I'm the detective that examined you after the murder, which probably would not have happened only for your stupidity. I shall mention this little affair to Mr. Myers in the morning."

The fellow's eyes had increased considerably in size and his jaw dropped, but before he had time to speak a movement on the part of the man inside the bank caused Thad to look in that direction, and the watchman followed his gaze with his own eyes.

As they looked the man stepped out from his place of concealment into the light, so that they had a perfect view of his face.

Thad was horrified at the sight, and as for the watchman, he clutched at the detective's arm, and uttered a terrified groan.

"My God!" he gasped. "It's him!"

Thad thought he recognized the features, nevertheless he involuntarily asked in a bated voice:

"Who?"

"The murdered cashier!" groaned the frightened watchman.

The detective had no longer any doubt about the features or where he had seen them.

They were unmistakably those of the man whom he had seen lying sweltering in his own blood in front of the despoiled safe the morning after the murder and robbery.

To add to the perfection of the likeness, there was the crimson stain extending from the temple where the bullet had entered down over the cheek!

CHAPTER VIII.

THE WARNING VOICE.

As soon as the effect of his first surprise had passed off Thad turned upon the still trembling watchman, and seeing his plight, smiled at him.

The poor fellow's eyes were still riveted on the gruesome object inside the bank, his face was white with terror and he trembled like a man with palsy.

"What is the matter?" laughed the detective.

"The ghost!" gasped the watchman.

"Nonsense!" cried Thad. "There is no more ghost about that fellow in there than you are."

"What?"

"It's a fraud, depend upon it."

"How can it be, sor? It's the very image of the murdered cashier."

"I admit that. But it's some one made up to resemble him, and for no honest purpose. We must get inside and investigate this matter at once. Have you a key?"

"Yes, sor, to the outside door."

"That will do. Give it to me."

The watchman handed Thad the key and he put it into the lock and opened the door.

The two men stepped quietly in, the watchman still white and trembling with fear.

"Have you a pistol?" whispered the detective.

"Yes," tremblingly responded the other.

"Then draw it and have it ready in case you need it."

The watchman did as he was ordered.

"Now remain here and see that he does not make his escape and I will go back and investigate," said Thad.

He walked to the rear of the bank on tip-toe.

Within a few feet of the rear end of the partition dividing the main room from the corridor and only a short distance from the door leading into the cashier's office, was a door through which the clerks had to pass to get into the main office.

It was near this door that the detective had espied the apparition, and on reaching it now he confidently expected to find it open, and not finding it so, he softly tried the knob.

To his disappointment it was locked.

He now peered through the brass screen which arose several feet above the counter and guarded the main room, and was not only disappointed but astonished to see that the apparition had disappeared.

From this point he had a complete view of the interior of the main office, and yet, unless the person whom he had seen from the outside was concealed near the counter, he was no longer in the room.

Thad could now see the young man who watched the bank on the inside, and saw that he was peacefully reposing in a cot standing in the middle of the floor.

Foy's boast of being a light sleeper now recurred to Thad, and he at once came to the conclusion that either the young man had boasted without grounds or that he had been chloroformed by the mysterious invader.

Deeming it possible that, hearing the approach of the detective, the intruder had squatted down behind the counter, Thad again returned to the street and peered in through the window again, but to his dismay there was no one in sight.

The detective was mystified, and, without bestowing any credence upon the watchman's declaration that the apparition was in reality a ghost, he could not avoid recurring to the observation with a feeling akin to awe.

The watchman still kept his place, trembling and pale as before.

Thad returned to the rear of the bank and peered once more through the screen, only to find the place inside deserted as before.

There appeared to be but one thing to be done, and that was to wake the inside watchman, make him open the door, and search the premises.

To that end the detective rapped sharply on the screen.

The young man instantly sprung up and stared at the detective.

"Who are you, and what do you want?" he demanded.

"I am the detective who examined you the other day," replied Thad. "Open the door. There is something wrong here."

"Something wrong?" repeated the young man.

"Yes. Open the door, quick."

The young man approached the glass door sleepily, threw back the bolt, and when he came face to face with the detective, asked:

"What's the matter?"

"There was somebody in here a moment ago, and," pursued Thad, after looking about and failing to see any one, "he must be here somewhere now, as there does not appear any way for him to escape."

"A man in here?" cried the watchman in consternation.

"Yes."

"Impossible!"

"I tell you it is not impossible. I saw him with my own eyes, as did also the other watchman."

Foy began to grow anxious.

"But," he persisted, "where could he have got in, where did he go to, and how could he have been in here without waking me?"

The first two questions were difficult, and Thad did not attempt to answer them, but the last one he thought easy enough of solution.

"I guess it would not be so hard for any one to come in here without waking you," replied the detective. "The other watchman and I have been knocking about here for some minutes, and you did not wake till I hammered on the screen here. But where the fellow got in, or where he has disappeared to, I shall not attempt to answer."

The outside watchman, in spite of Thad's positive injunction for him to remain near

the door, was impelled by his own curiosity to desert his post to see what was going on, and put his head in at the door at this juncture.

As the detective concluded the last sentence he turned, and his eyes fell upon the watchman.

The latter shook his head grimly and said:

"No, sor, it's no use in yez or anny of us morthals to thry to answer that question, for who in the worreld kin tell phwere ghosts comes from or phwere they goes?"

And the old man crossed himself piously.

In spite of his perplexity, Thad could not help laughing at the old fellow's simplicity.

"You'll find him a pretty tough ghost—if you ever find him at all, my good man," he remarked good-naturedly, "and for that reason I will have to ask you to get back to your post by the front door where you will be able to intercept him in case he attempts to escape."

The old watchman hung his head and shuffled back to the place without another word, but it was evident that he firmly believed that if the mysterious visitor was ever discovered he would be found to be made of that filmy material such as ghosts are supposed to be made of.

Meanwhile the detective, assisted by Foy, set about searching for a secret outlet from the room through which the intruder might have made his escape.

Every panel in the wainscoting was carefully examined and sounded, every inch of the floor was carefully gone over and scrutinized, but to no purpose. There could be nothing found which indicated that such a thing as a secret passage or door existed.

Thad was puzzled.

He did not entertain the watchman's ghost theory for an instant, but at the same time he was compelled to acknowledge himself defeated in his attempt to unravel the mystery.

Foy was the least concerned of any one in the party, for in the first place, he knew, or thought he did, the building too thoroughly to even imagine that there was anything about it different from any other building, and the part he had taken in the search for false panels and secret passages had only been taken for the purpose of satisfying the detective; and in the second place, he had not seen the apparition, and was very much inclined to the opinion that both the detective and the old watchman had been deceived by some optical illusion.

"This is about as strange an affair as I ever had anything to do with," observed Thad, after they had completed the inspection. "I have known a good many mysteries, but this beats them all."

The young man shrugged his shoulders.

"It is a little queer," he rejoined, "if you saw anything."

"If we saw anything—"

But Thad hesitated. He recognized that it would do no good to discuss the matter with the boy, and he also felt that it was perfectly natural for the young man, not having seen the mysterious apparition, to be skeptical on the subject.

At almost the same instant they were startled by the sound of a voice which appeared to emanate directly from the wall, and which said in deep, sepulchral voice:

"Why vex your silly brains in the attempt to solve the mystery, fools? You will never succeed. Nor will you ever unravel that other mystery—who committed the murder and robbery, strive as you may. Mark my words and act accordingly, for I am the Dead Witness!"

Foy's skepticism vanished, and the half sneer which he had worn all along gave way to an expression of fear.

But the detective laughed.

"This is some trick," he averred, "and you will do well to sleep with one eye open, in future, young man, and there is no doubt that you will be able to catch the impostor who is playing this ruse."

"Time will tell whether I am an impostor or not," came the voice from the wall. "If I am an impostor, find me."

"If you are not an impostor," rejoined Thad quickly, "who and what are you?"

"I have told you. I am the Dead Witness."

"In which you lied, of course. But no matter. Let us suppose, for the sake of

argument, that you are, as you say, dead. Very well. You also call yourself a witness. What are you a witness of?"

"I was a witness to the late tragedy enacted in this bank."

The young man clutched the detective's arm.

"Don't!" he gasped. "Don't question it any further, sir! It may get angry and do us a great injury!"

Thad laughed.

"That is what I would like above all things," he replied. "There is no surer and easier way of inducing a fraud to expose himself than by making him angry."

"But this is not a fraud, sir," pleaded the boy. "I'm sure it is not."

"And I am quite as sure that it is."

And then addressing himself again to the mysterious speaker, the detective continued:

"You say you were a witness to the late tragedy?"

"Yes."

"That is interesting. You are, above all persons, or goblins if you prefer the title, the very one I am anxious to consult. Perhaps you wouldn't mind telling me who the guilty party is, for of course you know?"

"I do know," replied the voice, "but you shall never know."

"Thanks. Then perhaps you will be good enough to tell me who is not guilty? For instance, whether the cashier, Dawson, who is now under arrest, is guilty or not?"

"Neither can I tell you that. I may tell you some time, but not now."

"You are a decidedly unjust ghost, I must say. If the young man is innocent, it is very wrong and unjust to keep him in prison or prosecute him for the crime."

"Being a disembodied spirit, my testimony would go for nothing any way, but I will tell you this much, whether he is guilty or not, it will never be proved against him."

"That will be a consolation to him, at any rate. But what is your motive in haunting this place, Mr. Ghost, if you will not expose the criminal and free the innocent?"

But whether the alleged goblin was able to answer the last question or not, he was evidently not inclined to do it, for although Thad repeated the question several times, and used other means to induce him to speak, he never uttered another word, and the detective finally abandoned the effort.

"There can be no doubt about this being the biggest kind of a humbug, young man," he said, "and I want you to keep a sharp lookout for him."

"Oh, Lord!" cried the young watchman, "I shall not dare to stay in here alone another night after this! Mr. Myers will have to get some one else to stay."

"What are you afraid of, you foolish fellow?" laughed Thad.

"I don't know what the thing is, sir, but I don't propose to risk my life for any amount of money."

"You have been staying here right along since the murder, and have not been molested so far."

"That is true, but I did not know of the existence of this thing, or I wouldn't have staid."

"Be a man. There is nothing to be afraid of," insisted the detective.

"Maybe not, but even if I were to stay, I couldn't sleep."

"So much the better, there will be all the better chance of your discovering this fraud."

While these events were passing it was gradually growing daylight, and by this time it was broad day.

Thad made another careful but ineffectual examination of the paneling of the wall, and especially of that part in the vicinity where he heard the voice, and finally abandoned it.

He called at the bank the following day and was informed by the president that Foy absolutely refused to stop in the bank alone any longer, and Mr. Myers gladly accepted the detective's proposition to remain there himself. So when the time came for the watchman to go on duty inside the bank, Thad, so thoroughly disguised that his best friends would not have recognized him, entered the place and took up the position of watchman.

It is needless to say that he did not sleep much, and when he did occasionally drop

off into a light doze, it was so light that the slightest noise awakened him. But the night passed and no goblin put in an appearance.

This convinced him more than ever that the perpetrator of the ruse was a fraud, and determined him more than ever to catch him if it were within the power of mortals to do it.

To that end he spent every night in the bank for the next week, but with the same result.

Meanwhile he was not idle in the daytime.

He made every possible effort to discover the whereabouts of Dixie and also of young Meredith, Mr. Myers's nephew, but without avail.

He did discover that no one with the name or answering the description of Meredith had sailed for Europe at the time at which it was said he had or subsequently, and he believed from that that the young man was still in the city. He also believed that he had something to do with the disappearance of the girl, and continued his search.

Finally the trial of Dawson came on, and, as may be supposed, there was not sufficient evidence to convict him. There was a good deal of circumstantial evidence, but every item of evidence that pointed to the guilt of the cashier also pointed as directly to the complicity if not guilt of the president, and the latter not only refused to prosecute the accused, but it was generally believed that he had used his influence and perhaps money toward his acquittal.

Howbeit, after a very short trial, Dawson was set at liberty.

CHAPTER IX.

FOR JUSTICE AND VENGEANCE.

WHEN Alfred Dawson was released from prison, he returned to his lodgings on Fifth avenue, only to find them deserted not only by his mistress, but the servants as well.

After looking about the desolate place for some moments, the young man sat down and buried his face in his hands.

It was not till now that the full weight of his shame and degradation came upon him.

He felt that he had not a friend in the world.

Even little Lynch, who had been his devoted friend in the days of prosperity, had kept aloof from him in his troubles.

He did not understand this, and naturally attributed it to perfidy and selfishness common to the world in general, but such was, in reality, not the case. The advice and fright the young man had received at the hands of Thad on the occasion of his attempt to carry the letter to Dixie, had deterred him from daring to meddle with the case from that time forward.

He had called at the boarding-house of Mrs. Wright once in the hope of seeing Dixie, but failing to see her, had never called again. So it was due to cowardice, and not selfishness, that Lynch had kept aloof from his friend.

But Dawson, cold-blooded and indifferent himself, dismissed the matter with the muttered declaration:

"Like all the rest, when my friendship is no longer worth anything to him, he abandons me. But, curse them all!" he went on, after a good deal of bitter rumination, "I will not only show them that I am worthy of their friendship and esteem, but I will vindicate myself and make some people sweat blood for this outrage!"

Having relieved himself to this extent, he arose and began to pace the floor.

He had not continued thus for more than five minutes, when there came a ring at his door-bell.

"Who the deuce can that be?" he muttered. "Some of my so-called friends slinking back, I presume. But, curse them, they will find me as cold toward them as they have been to me!"

Musing thus, he forgot the fact that there was no servant in the house to open the door until the bell rung a second time.

Then he hastened to the electric button which opened the street door and pushed it.

A moment later there came a third ring, this time from the private bell on his hall-door.

Dawson walked leisurely to the door and opened it.

He was met by a total stranger, a man whom he was sure he had never seen before. The new-comer was a man past the middle-age, apparently, with snowy hair and beard of the same color, trimmed to a point, and his dress and bearing denoted him a polite and well-to-do gentleman.

Dawson's first impression was that the stranger had made a mistake and called at the wrong number, but he was soon undeceived, for the stranger bowed politely, smiled benignantly, and said:

"This is Mr. Alfred Dawson, I presume? Here is my card."

Dawson took the card in a dazed sort of way, and read the name, "Mr. Clarence Goodale," underneath which was written in pencil, "Introduced by Charles V. Dawson."

The young man looked up in astonishment.

"You know my father, then, sir?" he said.

"Your father is a very old and dear friend of mine," replied the new-comer.

"I am glad to know you, sir," continued Dawson. "Come in."

When the two men were seated in the drawing-room the old gentleman turned to Dawson and began:

"You are surprised to see me here, no doubt?"

"How could it be otherwise?" returned the ex-cashier. "You must remember that I never saw or heard of you till this minute."

"True enough, although it is strange that your father never spoke of me to you. But never mind that. Your father tells me that you are in trouble."

"So I am," rejoined Dawson bitterly. "But when I was in still greater trouble, that is, when I was locked up in prison, my father, as well as the rest of my friends, never thought it worth their while to so much as call upon me."

"I do not know anything about that, my friend. As a matter of fact, although your father's friend, you could hardly look upon me as your friend, and therefore you cannot consistently censure me. However, I did not come here to discuss matters of this kind. You are in trouble and I came here to help you out."

Dawson scrutinized him closely and saw that he possessed a kindly, fatherly face, but made no response, and the stranger continued:

"In the first place, let me ask you what you think of doing."

"That I have not decided upon yet, sir."

"Then let me say that it is important that you decide at once. While you are out of jail—acquitted by the laws of justice—public opinion—your friends—have not acquitted you, and are not likely to until the real criminal has been found."

"That is true, and I shall do all in my power to discover and bring to justice the real criminal, as well as wreak a most terrible vengeance upon those who have conspired to get me into this trouble."

"Then we will work together. I have money and have had a good deal of experience in working out mysteries of this kind. Will you trust and assist me?"

Dawson studied the face again, and then put out his hand and replied warmly:

"I will."

"Very well. Now, let us get to business. There has been a detective working on the case, I believe?"

"Yes."

"And he has accomplished nothing?"

"Apparently not, although I am surprised at it, for he has the name of being the brightest of his kind in the country."

"Still, he has accomplished nothing?"

"No."

"What has become of Dixie?"

Dawson looked at him in surprise. How had he found out all his private affairs? thought the young man.

"I know no more than you," he finally replied.

"You have no idea where she might have gone?"

"Not the slightest. Like all my other friends—"

"Do you think it likely that she might

have gone off with Meredith?" interrupted Mr. Goodale.

"I have not given the matter a thought, but now that you mention it, it may be so. No," he said, suddenly checking himself, "come to think of it, Meredith has gone to Europe."

"That is what you supposed, but allow me to tell you that you are mistaken."

"He has not gone?"

"No."

"Do you know where he is?"

"I do not, but should be glad to know."

"Do you think it possible that he is in New York?"

"I think it quite likely."

"I am glad of that," said Dawson, brightening.

"Why?"

"I have written to him, and if he is in the city he is sure to be here this afternoon."

"That is good. I also hope he is here."

Again Dawson regarded his new friend with surprise.

"Do you know him?" he finally asked.

"Only slightly, but I am anxious to know him better."

The ex-cashier looked puzzled.

"Why, may I ask?" he inquired.

"I cannot say just yet, but it may turn out that we will both have occasion to know him better."

The young man flushed crimson.

"Why, sir, you do not suspect that the—"

"I will not say what I do or do not suspect," interrupted the old gentleman. "Suffice it to say that we will begin our search by looking into his operations for the past few weeks."

"But, my dear sir, while I know Meredith to be wild and extravagant, and that he was once led to the extreme of robbing his uncle of a small amount, there could be no reason for his doing such a thing now, and especially do I not believe him capable of committing such a crime as has been done on this occasion."

"Why not?"

"He is not the kind of man that would commit murder, for one thing, even if the assistant cashier had not been his own brother; and another thing, he has recently come into a large fortune, which renders it unnecessary for him to steal."

"What you say may all be true. But, if I am not mistaken, he holds a grudge against you, first, for not interceding with his uncle to get him reinstated in the bank, and second, because the woman we spoke of awhile ago left him to go with you. Am I right?"

The young man colored.

"There is no doubt that Meredith was put out a good deal by these things, but the last time I saw him he professed the greatest friendship for me."

"Which may or may not have been sincere. But he has also expressed his enmity against his uncle, and he has not been in the house for a long time."

"That is true, he is out with his uncle, and has not been in the house for nearly a year."

"Very well. Now we have a double motive. So far as the money is concerned, even a rich man, especially if he is a spendthrift, may be tempted by three hundred thousand dollars. Besides, it was necessary to take the money in order to accomplish his object—supposing his object to have been your ruin, and possibly that of his uncle in the bargain."

"But the murder? How do you account for that?"

"That is a mystery—a great mystery—but may be explained in this way: Suppose he had persuaded his brother to assist him in his plot, and then when he got into the cash-room, quarreled, and Clarence shot his brother. Such things have been done."

"That is true, but, as I say, although I know Clarence Meredith to be unscrupulous and full of intrigue, I could not believe him capable of murder. Besides, what you say about persuading his brother to go in with him on such a plot, that is not possible."

"Why?"

"Well, in the first place, George was one of the most upright young men I ever met, and in the second place the two brothers were not on speaking terms."

"Only another motive for the crime. You say that he came to you and professed his friendship. Possibly he did the same with his brother when he found it would suit his convenience."

At that moment there came a ring at the door-bell.

Dawson started up.

"That must be he now," he exclaimed.

"He must not see me here," said the old gentleman.

"Very well, step into my bedroom there. You may be able to hear something that will help us along in our work."

"That is what I desire. Now, my friend, play your part well. Be as downcast and hopeless as possible, and let us see whether he is the friend he pretends to be."

And the old gentleman—or to be more explicit, Thad Burr, for he it was, in disguise—stepped behind a *portiere* dividing the bedroom from the parlor, and the young man opened the door.

As he had expected, Dawson found his pretended friend Clarence Meredith standing there.

He affected to be overwhelmed with joy at the deliverance of Dawson, and almost hugged him on entering the room.

"How are you, old fellow!" he cried. "You do not know how glad I am to see you a free man again!"

"If I were only a free man," rejoined the other despondently.

"But you are a free man," declared Meredith.

"Only in the eyes of justice. In the eyes of the world I am a felon, and shall be until the real criminal is found, and God knows when that will be."

"True enough, my poor boy," said the other, sympathetically. "But you must not despair. Let us hope that he will soon be found. I suppose you are pretty short of money, aren't you, old fellow?"

"Not particularly. At least, I have enough to carry me along for the present, thanks."

"I am glad of that. But if you want any, you know, you are welcome to half I have."

"It is very kind of you, but I am not in need of any at present."

"Well, should you run short, don't fail to call on me. I was sure you would be short, and hastened to see you as soon as I received your note. By the way, what are you going to do?"

"I cannot tell."

"I presume you will try to get back into the bank?"

"Certainly not. That would be the last thing I should think of doing."

"It would be humiliating. I'll tell you, if I were in your place I would leave town until the real culprit is caught."

"But suppose he were never to be caught?" suggested Dawson.

"In that case I should stay away altogether."

"That would be an excellent way of proving to the world that I was guilty of the crime with which I was charged. No, sir, I shall stand my ground like a man."

Meredith looked a little disappointed at this decision, and hastened to change the subject.

"Where is Dixie?" he asked, glancing about him.

"The very question I should have asked, Clarence," rejoined Dawson.

"I have no idea."

"You have not seen her since my arrest?"

"No."

"Nor heard anything about her?"

"Not a syllable."

"Oh, well, let her go. Rats will desert a sinking ship," sighed Dawson.

"You can depend upon her for deserting you," laughed Meredith. "She's just that kind."

And when Thad peeped out and caught a glimpse of the young man's face at that moment, he did not fail to see a sparkle of exultation in his black eyes.

After a little more conversation, Meredith arose and said:

"Well, old fellow, I must run. I hope to see you soon again, and trust you will be in better spirits then. Don't forget the money. If you need any, let me know."

"Thanks! I shall not forget, Clarence," responded Dawson rather formally.

"Don't," persisted the other effusively.

"Good-by."

"Good-by, Clarence. Come up soon again."

"Oh, I shall."

And, shaking the ex-cashier's hand, he hurried from the room.

"Well, what do you think now?" asked Thad as soon as he returned to the room.

"I am half inclined to believe you are right in your conjecture," replied Dawson.

"The fellow certainly has no heart in him, and I think we will do well to watch him. Suppose we follow him and see whether he does not go to Dixie?"

"Not now," objected Thad. "We must call upon Mr. Myers."

"Not for the world!"

"But we must."

CHAPTER X.

A STRANGE INTERVIEW.

DAWSON still strangely objected to calling upon the banker who had been so well convinced of his guilt as to allow him to go to prison, and yet he had not dared to prosecute him, for he believed that he was concerned in the plot to ruin him.

But the detective had an object in getting the two men together once more, and would not be put off.

"It is absolutely necessary to our success, my young friend, that you should call upon him with me," he insisted. "You need not speak a word beyond introducing me as your relative, and I will do all the talking."

"It will be a terrible ordeal for me to meet that man without throttling him, but if you insist—"

"I do insist. You can certainly hold your temper for five or ten minutes, and your revenge may come sooner than you expect."

"Very well, I submit, but, as I say, it will be a terrible ordeal. Besides, she—"

He hesitated and colored up.

"Never mind Estelle," interposed Thad. "I will see that she is out of the way. Now go and fix yourself up a little. Put on another suit and a white tie. That suit, which you wore in the prison is hardly the thing to call upon the president of a great banking house in. Besides we will dine while we are out."

Dawson withdrew to arrange his toilet, and Thad began to ruminate upon a plan of operations.

Just then the door-bell rung again, and the detective opened the door.

It was the janitor.

"Is Mr. Dawson in?" he asked.

"Yes. He is dressing at present," replied Thad.

"Well, here is a letter for him. It was brought by a messenger, and he would neither put the letter in the box nor bring it up, so I had to bring it myself."

Thad took the letter, which he noticed was very thick.

It was addressed in type-writing, and bore no post-mark.

"I will give it to him," said the detective, and closed the door.

"Here is a letter for you, my boy," he cried, when he got inside again, "and from appearances, it is well-filled with money or advertising matter."

"One of those nuisances of advertisements, I suppose," replied Dawson carelessly from behind the *portieres*.

A few minutes later, however, when he came out, dressed for the journey, he picked up the letter and tore it open, when to his astonishment, he found it to contain ten one-thousand-dollar bills.

"What the deuce does this mean?" he exclaimed.

"What is it?" asked the detective, rising and approaching the table.

As soon as his eyes fell upon the money, he shook his head and observed:

"A part of the scheme, depend upon it. Read the letter and see if that throws any light upon the subject."

The advice was unnecessary, as the young man was already perusing the letter.

When he had finished reading it he handed it to the detective.

Like the direction on the envelope, it was type-written, and ran as follows:

"MY DEAR DAWSON:—"

"A friend and well-wisher who is acquainted with your late troubles and who knows that you must be short of funds, takes the liberty of sending you the inclosed as a slight token of his devotion and for the purpose of tiding you over your present difficulties. Be assured that you have at least one warm friend left, and let him advise you to leave New York, which, in the nature of things, must be distasteful to you after what has happened. Go West, to Europe—anywhere where you are unknown, and outlive your shame. You are still young and the future is before you. Peace and happiness to you."

"Sincerely,"

"A FRIEND."

When Thad raised his eyes to Dawson's face he saw that he was white and trembling with rage.

"What do you think of it?" he asked.

"As I said," replied the detective, "it is the work of your enemies. They are determined that you shall leave New York. Their own safety and peace of mind depend upon your going, and as soon as possible."

"I believe you, Mr. Burr," said the young man sadly. "And for that very reason, more than any other, I am determined to stay and fight it out with them."

"That is the only thing to do, my friend, and we will beat them in the end."

Meanwhile the detective had taken a notebook from his pocket and was busy comparing the numbers on the bills with some memoranda he had jotted down.

Finally raising his head, he said:

"None of these bills belong to the stolen money."

The young man was astonished at the information.

"How do you know, sir?" he asked eagerly.

"None of the numbers correspond."

"I had no notion what the numbers on the stolen bills were."

"But I had. They have a memorandum of the numbers of all the bills of large denomination, and they have discovered that one hundred of the bills stolen were of the denomination of one thousand dollars, but, as I say, none of the numbers correspond with any of the numbers on these ten bills."

"Then there is no clue to be got from them."

"On the contrary, I believe there is. Let us see who the messenger is."

"Shall I call the janitor?"

"If you please."

Dawson left the room, and soon returned with the janitor.

"Do you know the messenger who brought this package, janitor?" demanded Thad.

"Yes, sir. He delivers packages here every day. He is likely to come again at any time."

"Very well. If he comes again within the next hour send him up."

"I will, sir."

When the janitor had taken his departure Thad said:

"We will wait an hour in the hope that the messenger may turn up, although there is not much chance of his doing so."

"Very little, I should say. Still, there will be no harm in waiting," rejoined Dawson.

The two men sat talking over their future plans for some time, and scarcely half an hour had elapsed before the bell rung, and when the door was opened the janitor ushered in the messenger.

Thad showed him the envelope and asked him if he remembered having brought it.

"Yes, sir," replied the messenger, "I remember it very well."

"Where did you get it?"

"It was handed to me on the corner of the street below."

"By whom?"

"Another messenger."

"Do you know him?"

"Never saw him before."

"Can you describe him?"

"No, sir, I don't believe I can. He was a boy of about my own age, maybe. But taller and slimmer; but with their uniforms on, messenger boys look so much alike that, unless there is something peculiar about

them, it is hard to tell one from the other."

"Did he say where he got it?"

"No, sir. He handed me the letter and ten cents and said he had another trip to make and that he would whack up with me on the tariff if I would deliver it."

"But he told you not to bring it to the person to whom it was to be delivered, did he?"

"Yes, sir, he said it was to be given to the janitor."

"Do you think you would recognize the messenger if you saw him again?"

"I think I would, sir."

"Well, I'll tell you what I will do. As you walk about the city on your errands keep a sharp look-out for him, and report here every evening what success you have had, and I will give you two dollars for the day. If you locate the messenger I will give you ten dollars extra. Is it a bargain?"

"You bet," cried the boy, rapturously.

"Very well. Begin to-morrow and make your report to-morrow evening about six o'clock and get your first day's pay."

"All right, sir, and thank ye."

When the messenger was gone Thad took up the letter again and went over it carefully.

Dawson watched his countenance and presently saw it light up as with an inspiration.

"I have made a discovery!" he exclaimed.

"What is it?" asked Dawson, anxiously.

"Two discoveries, in fact—yes, three," he went on, as he continued to examine the letter. "In the first place, this letter was not written by a professional type-writer. I know that from the frequent errors which have been corrected by printing one letter over the other; in the second place, the composition is that of a woman."

"How do you know that?" inquired the young man, curiously.

"By the wording. A man is never afraid of his 'I's', while a woman will rack her brain for an hour to avoid using the pronoun too frequently."

"That is a new one on me. But what is the third discovery?"

"That the letter is not written on regular type-writer paper but on a leaf torn from a copy-book."

"I noticed that," replied the young man, "but I don't see how that is going to aid us any."

"You don't?"

"No, sir."

"Why, my boy, don't you see the page number in the corner? And don't you know that if we are ever lucky enough to run across the copy-book from which this was torn we will be able to recognize it by the loss of the leaf with that number on?"

"By Jove! you astound me, sir," exclaimed Dawson. "I cannot conceive how a man can notice all these trifling details."

"Trifling they may seem, my boy," observed Thad, "but just such trifles frequently lead to great results in detective work."

"You are a professional detective, then?" said Dawson staring with some concern at Thad.

Thad saw that he had nearly betrayed himself, but was too much of a strategist not to be able to turn the matter off.

"Oh no, not exactly," he replied indifferently. "The work of a detective is most interesting and delightful to me, and I have made the subject a study for my own amusement. That is all."

"Well, sir, if the average detective possessed your penetration, my opinion is that they would do much better work."

"Possibly. But let us be off."

And folding the letter and putting it into his pocket, he started for the door.

It was nearly five o'clock when the two men reached the residence of Mr. Myers on upper Fifth avenue, and the banker had just reached home.

When Thad sent up his card he merely mentioned that a young relative was with him, but the curious hall-boy could not resist peeping out to have a look at Dawson.

So when the banker entered the reception-room some minutes later, he was evidently prepared to meet his former cashier.

The two men glared at each other for several seconds, the banker purple with suppressed rage and the cashier white and motionless as a corpse.

Neither spoke, and the silence was growing painful when Thad put an end to it by beginning:

"I presume you know, Mr. Myers, that my nephew here has been acquitted of the crime with which he was charged?"

"Yes, I know," growled the banker, flopping down into a chair. "For want of evidence, I believe."

"That is it," returned Thad. "But, while he has been acquitted by the courts, public opinion has not acquitted him, and for that reason, although I believe him innocent, he will be compelled to leave the city, at least for the present."

The banker's countenance cleared a little.

"Ah, he is going away, is he?" sneered the old man. "Where is he going?"

"We have not yet decided. Perhaps to Europe, or maybe, out West. The further the better, we think."

"Right, sir," retorted the banker stiffly. "Very right. The further away the better."

Dawson's time had now come to color, and his face grew crimson. But he maintained silence.

"Yes, it will be for the best, Mr. Myers," continued Thad, "and my only object in calling with my nephew was to have him pay his respects to you before going."

"Then, sir," retorted the banker, rising abruptly, "you might have spared yourself the trouble, for I have nothing to say to him, and I do not presume he has anything to say to me. Good-day."

And turning upon his heel, he abruptly left the room.

When the detective and Dawson were in the street again the latter said:

"He was right about one thing. You might have saved yourself the trouble of that call, as well as myself the pain of meeting the old villain. Neither of us has gained anything."

"You have not, my boy, but I have."

"What?"

"I have made the discovery that he is as innocent of the robbery as yourself."

Dawson looked at him in astonishment.

"You astound me more than ever, sir," he remarked. "How, in the brief interview we have just had, was it possible for you to learn anything, much less that he is innocent?"

"His actions, my boy. If he were a guilty man he would have grown nervous and pale, but he betrayed nothing but anger at sight of you. I have gained a great point, my boy."

They had reached the corner of the street and were about to turn into a cross street, when Dawson was surprised to see little Lynch come running up.

He did not pay the slightest attention to his former friend, but rushed up to the detective and cried in an excited whisper:

"They have gone, sir."

"The deuce you say!" exclaimed Thad.

"How long since?"

"About fifteen minutes ago."

"Very well. Give them this note," said the detective, handing the little man an envelope.

Without another word Lynch grasped it and darted away.

Dawson could not speak for a minute or two, but finally gasped:

"What does this mean, sir?"

"Ask no questions, but come on," replied Thad, starting off on a brisk walk.

Turning down the cross street, they walked for two blocks and finally Thad stopped before a building, entered and ascended two flights of steps.

Here he stopped before a door with the sign "Fashionable Millinery," and knocked.

The door was promptly opened and a stout lady of forty stood before him.

Without a word the woman opened the door and ushered the two men into the private hall of a flat.

CHAPTER XI.

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING.

DAWSON was dazed and stupefied.

He could not understand what it all meant, and seemed to wonder what mysterious thing was likely to happen next.

As soon as the outside door was closed the detective turned to the stout woman and asked in a loud whisper:

"Where is she?"

The woman pointed to a door opening off the hall, and said:

"In there."

"Go ahead, then, and open the door."

"It is a parlor and the door is unlocked," rejoined the woman. "You have only to open it and walk in."

"Thanks."

And the detective grasped Dawson by the arm and almost dragged him along the hall till they came to the door, when he opened it and pushed the young man inside and then closed the door.

Thad then put his ear to the door to hear what went on.

It was not until the door closed upon him that Dawson realized his situation, and then only when he found himself face to face with a tall, beautiful woman.

It was Estelle Myers.

The girl had never appeared more beautiful to him, although she was very pale and seemed as much surprised at seeing Dawson as he was at meeting her.

The young man turned red and white by turns and the room swam before his eyes.

"Estelle!" he gasped involuntarily.

At the sound of his voice the girl instantly recovered her self-possession.

She drew herself up and became as cold and rigid as a statue.

A moment of silence passed, and then she said in a cold incisive tone:

"Well, sir, what are you doing here? How dare you come into this room—into my presence—without bidding?"

Dawson was speechless.

Finally he made out to falter:

"Pardon—me—I—"

"Well?" she interposed sharply.

"I assure you, Miss Myers, that it was no doing of mine. I—"

"What?" she snapped again.

"The fact is, I had no idea you were here. It was entirely through the will of another that I came into your presence, from which you banished me over a year ago—and for what cause God only knows."

The girl's lip curled.

"This is a very likely story," she lisped. "When you might have come back, when you had a clean spotless name to offer me, you disdained to do so; but now that you are disgraced, when even your former depraved associates loathe you, you come to me with the hope that I will pity and intercede for you!"

Dawson hung his head and did not speak for some moments.

At length he spoke, but without raising his eyes from the floor.

"In one thing you are right, Estelle," he rejoined in a faltering voice. "When I might have come back, I disdained to do so, but when you say that I come now in the hope of gaining your pity, you are mistaken. I desire no pity, and I deserve none, because I am not guilty of the crime with which I was charged, and therefore deserve only justification. You are the last one to whom I should think of coming for pity, even if I desired pity, because I know that you never loved me. Moreover, I believe that if you are not at the bottom of the plot to ruin me, you are—"

He hesitated.

His lips refused to utter the word.

And in the interval of silence he was startled at hearing a suppressed sob, but it did not come from the direction of the girl, but from another part of the room.

He raised his eyes and looked in the direction.

The sight that met him almost stupefied him.

There, crouching in a corner, was Dixie!

Her face was buried in her hands, and her slender form shook with emotion.

He quickly averted his eyes and turned them upon the woman before him.

He was more astonished to find her also in tears.

Estelle took a step forward as if about to approach the young man, but suddenly checked herself and drew a deep sigh.

"You wrong me, Alfred," she finally faltered in a voice broken with sobs. "I do love you, and always did, and I hope the day may some time come when I will be able to justify myself in your eyes. I want you to know that my conduct has not been of my choosing. I never wished you harm,

and never aided or sympathized with your enemies. Leave me. Go away where you are not known, and if you ever think of me at all, believe that you have at least one friend left. Farewell."

And before he was able to realize what had been passing, she left the room, followed by Dixie.

Dawson was almost delirious in his mystification.

The quick succession of strange events which had followed each other for the past few hours had almost turned his head.

How had they all been brought about?

Then he thought of the strange man who had introduced himself as his father's friend, and involuntarily attributed the whole complicated series of coincidents to him, and he began to wonder more than ever who he was, and as he thought the matter over, how he had first dragged him into the presence of the banker and then into that of Estelle, his consternation turned to anger, and a moment later, when Thad entered the little parlor, he was angry enough to have throttled the detective.

Rushing up to him, he demanded:

"Who are you, anyway?"

Thad exhibited no sign of emotion, smiled affably, and replied:

"Did I not tell you that I was a friend of your father's?"

"This is no explanation. What you tell me may or may not be true. If you are the friend that you pretend, what is to hinder you from telling me who and what you are?"

Thad smiled the more affably.

"What do you want?" he asked. "Do you want me to give you my biography—a minute account of all I have done since infancy? What difference does it make to you who or what I am, so long as I accomplish the work for which we started out to do?"

"Still, I have a right to know what your plans are. I am dragged about like an automaton and treated to a series of surprises that are anything but agreeable, and I can see nothing resulting from it, beyond the harrowing up of my feelings."

"What good will it do for you to know my plans?"

"In order that I may know whether I want to accept or reject them."

"But suppose I guarantee success?"

"That is not sufficient! I want to know what I am doing. I would like the privilege of exercising my own will once in a while."

Thad laughed.

"A blind man must have a guide, my young friend," he asserted.

This only irritated the young man all the more.

"Perhaps I am blind," he rejoined, "but if I am, I prefer at least to choose my own guide. I am convinced that all this mysterious business can lead up to nothing for my good, and besides I have arrived at that point where it is immaterial what becomes of me anyway. So if you will state what your past services are worth I will pay you and we will go no further."

"You must be mad."

"Unfortunately, I am not. But, as Estelle does not love me, and I have no more to live for, I can see no reason for continuing this farce any longer."

"Be reasonable, and above all, be patient. I tell you that all will come out right in the end. I know from what she said—"

"Then you heard what passed?" interrupted Dawson.

"Every word."

"What right—"

"Never mind. The thing may look presumptuous, but the end justifies the means. Listen. She is under the influence of some one—your enemy—and when we have found that person or those persons, we will have found the perpetrator of the robbery and murder. Will you be reasonable and patient and allow me to restore you to your place in society and bring the culprits to justice, or will you slink away into obscurity, covered with shame and weighed down with sorrow?"

Dawson was silent for a long time and his bosom heaved with conflicting emotions.

Thad waited patiently for his decision.

At length the young man raised his head, and, putting out his hand, said:

"I will trust you, Mr. Goodale. You could have no motive for what you are doing but my own good. Go on. I will follow you to the end of the world."

"Good!" ejaculated the detective, taking the proffered hand. "Now you talk like a sensible man. Come, we must go. We have much to do."

Dawson did not speak till they were again in the street, and then only to ask:

"Where now?"

"Back to your lodgings," replied Thad.

Taking a cab at Fifth avenue, they were not long in reaching Dawson's lodgings on the same thoroughfare three miles lower down, and the young man was surprised to find a number of moving vans in front of the house.

"Somebody moving out, I suppose," he observed as they ascended the stoop.

"Come on up-stairs and I will tell you about it," said the detective.

Dawson was again filled with wonder at the unaccountable actions of this strange friend, but said nothing.

When they had reached his sitting room Thad turned upon him and said:

"You will be surprised when I tell you what I have done, but when you have taken time to think of it, you will see that the course was a wise one. You have given it out that you are to leave the city. Now, in order to leave this impression, you must conceal yourself. My idea is for you to go to a quiet boarding-house which I will take you to over in Brooklyn, and remain there until we get things in a shape that you can come out of your hiding. Meanwhile you will have no use for all this furniture, and I have taken the liberty of selling it at what I deem a pretty good figure, and these people are only awaiting your orders to remove it."

As soon as Dawson had time to recover from his surprise, he shrugged his shoulders and replied:

"Very well, Mr. Goodale. I am in your hands, body and soul. Let it go."

That night Dawson occupied the identical room which Dixie had occupied in Mrs. Wright's boarding-house in Hicks street, Brooklyn.

Thad also took a room in the house temporarily, although in his present disguise the landlady did not know him from Adam.

After Dawson had retired to his room the detective called upon him for the purpose of discussing their plans for the future.

"There is a point of which I have never spoken to you, my young friend," began the detective. "I do not know whether I spoke to you about a scratch I found on the front of the safe the day following the robbery."

"You did not," rejoined Dawson absently, for he was thinking about another matter at that moment.

"Well, there was a scratch, or rather a double scratch, describing a semicircle around the knob which opened the lock. It is just such a scratch as might be made by the stone in a ring worn on the middle finger. Do you know of anybody about the bank who wears such a ring?"

Dawson regarded the detective curiously and finally answered:

"Why, yes, the president wears just such a ring."

"You understand what I mean? The stone would have to be double-pointed."

"I understand."

"I noticed that Mr. Myers wears such a ring, but as he is innocent, we must find some one else with such a ring. Have you noticed the president's ring particularly?"

"Yes, he showed it to me at the time he received it, some five years ago."

"Where did he get it?"

"It was a present to him from the assistant cashier."

"The man who was murdered?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you know where he bought it?"

"I do not, but I presume Mr. Myers would know."

"We must find out. Another thing. Did you notice the scratch before the robbery?"

"I did not. In fact, I could almost swear that there was no scratch on the door the last time I opened the door."

"Did you ever notice whether George

Meredith wore a ring on the middle finger of his right hand or not?"

"I don't believe he did."

"Still, you are not positive?"

"Yes, I could swear to it, now that I recall it, for I remember his making a remark about the old gentleman wearing a ring on that hand, and laughed about it, which he would hardly have done had he been in the habit of wearing one there himself."

"Very true. How about his brother Clarence? Do you remember whether he wore a ring on that finger or not?"

"I am sure that he did not. He wore a ring on the little finger of his right hand, but none on the middle finger."

"This appears to narrow it down to the old gentleman's ring, unless there is some one else found."

"So you believe him to have had something to do with it after all?"

"Not necessarily."

The detective's reply left the impression in the ex-cashier's mind that the president might be guilty after all, but the detective had come to be such an enigma to him that he hardly knew what to think.

Meanwhile he remained silent and Thad resumed:

"There is another subject about which I wish to ask you. Are you aware of the existence of any secret passages or outlets about the main room of the bank?"

"Why, sir, you astonish me!" declared Dawson. "Of course not. There are none."

"You are quite positive that there are none?"

"Certainly."

"Then I'm afraid that you are not as well acquainted with the construction of the building as I am myself."

"What do you mean?"

Thad related in detail the account of the mysterious apparition which called itself the Dead Witness.

At its conclusion Dawson said:

"And you say that the person or apparition resembled the murdered cashier?"

"The very image of him."

"This is, indeed, a mystery. It could have been nobody else but the cashier's brother Clarence, but the question is, how did he get in there?"

"In no other way than that which I suggest, through some secret passage."

CHAPTER XII.

A NEW FEATURE IN THE CASE.

For a long time after the detective had taken his departure, Dawson sat puffing at a cigar, plunged in deep thought.

The night was close and sultry, and before he realized it he found himself rocking with perspiration, and his head aching dreadfully from the excessive heat.

He arose and opened a window and again returned to his seat, but pulling his chair closer to the open window.

As he did so something fluttered out of the curtain, which was waving in the breeze coming in at the window, and Dawson picked it up.

It appeared to be a letter, but had evidently been torn in two.

He was about tossing it from him, but through some freak of curiosity quite uncommon to him, he turned himself to the light and began to examine it.

He at once saw that it was in the handwriting of Dixie, and he became interested at once.

The scrap was merely one-half of a letter which had been torn in two, but there was enough of it remaining to show that it had been intended for a man by the name of Rochfort, and that it was in answer to some proposition he had made to her. He could not tell what the proposition was, nor whether she acceded to it or not, but there was the words "betray" and "ingratitude," and also "best friend." There was a fragment of Dawson's own name and the words "keys" and "ring."

The fragment set the young man to thinking.

He knew a man by the name of Herbert Rochfort, who had some years previously fallen heir to a large fortune, and he was known to be a reckless, dissipated man. He had at one time been a heavy depositor in the banking-house of Dodd, Myers & Co.,

but had withdrawn the last of his funds the very day after the robbery. Indeed, it was he for whom the three hundred thousand dollars had been taken out of the vault the evening preceding the robbery and murder and placed in the safe in the cash-room.

But what puzzled the ex-cashier was, what had this man to do with Dixie or Dixie with him? Could he have had anything to do with the crime—a man of his wealth?

The young man was so much disturbed over the affair that he could not rest until he had gone to Thad's room and roused him out.

The detective, having lost so much sleep of late, had already gone to bed, and was in a doze when Dawson knocked at the door.

He saw that something was in the wind the moment he set eyes upon the young man's face.

"Come in," said the good-natured detective. "What's up?"

Dawson handed him the scrap of letter.

"Look at that," he requested, by way of explanation.

The detective took the fragment and glanced over its contents, but as there was no name signed to it, and he was unacquainted with Dixie's handwriting, it had no meaning to him.

"Well, what of it?" he asked.

"If I am not mistaken, it is a clue," rejoined Dawson.

"What kind of a clue?"

"Well, in the first place, it was written by Dixie, and it was intended for a man by the name of Herbert Rochfort."

"Well?"

"As you may infer from what there is left of the letter, it is in response to a request of some sort from this man."

"So I should infer."

"You will also notice that a fragment of my name is to be seen, showing that I was in some way referred to in the letter."

"Possibly. Well?"

"You will also see the words ingratitude, betray, etc., also 'keys' and 'rings.'"

"Yes, I see, and they may be significant, but who is this Rochfort?"

"He is, or was up to a short time ago, a very rich man."

"Earned or inherited?" interposed Thad.

"He fell heir to it about five years ago."

"I see. What is his character?"

"Reckless and dissipated, a Wall Street Sharper of the worst kind."

"Possibly involved."

"I should so infer from the fact that he only lately withdrew his funds from our house."

"When was this?"

"The very morning after the robbery and murder."

"This looks significant," observed the detective, becoming interested. "What was the amount he withdrew?"

"Three hundred thousand dollars."

"The same amount that was stolen."

"Exactly. In fact, the money that was stolen was taken out of the vault the night before and put into the safe for him because he said he would be around as soon as the bank opened for his money."

"This he told you the day before, eh?"

"Yes. He said he was compelled to have the money at as early an hour as possible, and knowing the time it took to count the money—so large an amount as that—and bring it up out of the vault, I thought to save him from waiting in the morning by bringing it up the night before."

Thad turned his attention to the fragment once more.

"As you suggest, this may turn out to be a valuable clue," he finally remarked.

"Where does this man live?"

"In Fifty-seventh street, just out of Fifth avenue."

"You do not know the number?"

"No, but you will undoubtedly find it in the Directory."

"So I will. I shall make a call upon him tomorrow."

Accordingly the following morning Thad returned home and, after disguising himself as a rather verdant young man, looked up the address of Mr. Herbert Rochfort and called upon him and made application for the position of footman.

Fortunately the gentleman was in need of a footman or valet, rather, as his young man

had left him the day before, and liking the appearance of Thad engaged him, after examining his letters of recommendation—which the detective had written himself.

Little of importance transpired that day, but in the evening while the new valet was dressing his master to go out to dinner, a visitor was announced, and Mr. Rochfort must have been very anxious to see him for he admitted him to his presence without delay.

When the visitor entered the room, Thad was astonished to recognize the same young man who had called upon Dawson the day of his release from prison.

The two men appeared to be on the most intimate terms and, ignoring the presence of the valet, talked freely upon their most confidential matters.

From the first moment of the detective's meeting with Rochfort he felt sure that he had seen him somewhere, but for some reason he could not place him until he began to talk with young Meredith, and then it all came to him.

He was the same man he had seen come into the Grand Central Depot and meet Dixie on the evening on which the girl had so mysteriously disappeared.

Meredith wore a dark scowl when he entered the room, and it was quite evident that he was out of humor about something.

"Well, old fellow," began Rochfort, as soon as they had shaken hands, "what news?"

"Bad enough, I can tell you," replied the other.

"What now?" asked Rochfort, smiling.

"That little devil's run off and no one knows what has become of her."

It was Rochfort's turn to frown now.

His face, which was naturally dark and not particularly inviting, became almost fiendish in its malignance. His black eyes flashed and the whole face became suffused with rage.

"Whose fault was that?" he demanded, grinding his teeth.

"God only knows," rejoined the other.

"This will ruin us all."

"Perhaps not," rejoined Meredith, languidly, sinking into a chair.

"You take matters coolly," retorted Rochfort. "You must have forgotten what is at stake."

"By no means. I am as keenly awake to our position as yourself, but I am in the habit of looking at matters more philosophically. There is no good in crying over spilt milk. Besides it may not be so bad as you anticipate. The little witch knows next to nothing."

"She knows more than you imagine, and what she does know, now that she is out with the party, she is almost sure to blab to the first one that has an ear for her."

"Of course she has your letter—"

"Oh, as to that," interrupted Rochfort, impatiently, "there is nothing to fear. I took good care to procure that the last time I was there. The only thing I fear is her silly wagging little tongue. Does Mrs. M. know anything about her disappearance?"

"I haven't seen her."

"Then we must see her without delay."

"Very well. Get ready and we will drive around there before going to dinner."

"Yes, we will do that."

A short silence ensued, and then Rochfort resumed:

"I wonder if your cousin had any hand in spiriting her away?"

"Estelle?"

"Yes."

"I shouldn't wonder. It would be just like her, if she knew anything about the affair."

"But does she?"

"That I cannot tell. She is very sly, but her mother, knowing her preference for Dawson and her repugnance for anything of this nature, would naturally try to keep it away from her, but if she has got hold of Dixie the little minx has probably told her all about it."

Rochfort frowned more darkly than before.

"There is but one thing to be done with that little vixen," he growled.

"What is that?"

"Silence her."

"How is that?"

"There is but one way to silence a person, especially a woman."

"I follow you. The same as the other party, eh?"

"That is it."

"That would be rather cruel in her case, don't you think so, old fellow?"

"Not at all—if it is done administratively."

This appeared to strike both men as very funny, and they laughed uproariously.

"That is a new way of putting it," observed Meredith, "but it is none the less expressive. A drop of something to quiet her nerves, I suppose would be plainer English for it."

"Perhaps."

"But there is one obstacle in the way of that."

"What is that?"

"Catching the little minx."

"True, we must catch the hare. And that must be our business, or rather your business."

"I will do my best."

"You must not only try, you must succeed."

"Ah, that is another thing."

"However," cried Rochfort, with a significant scowl, "you doubtless know what I mean when I say must."

Meredith laughed a trifle scornfully.

"You mean to insinuate that if I do not see the work is done, I will pay the penalty?"

"Ah, I see that we understand each other," growled Rochfort with another meaningful scowl.

"Yes."

Meredith turned abruptly and strode across the room, took a few nervous turns, and returned and faced Rochfort.

His own face was white and drawn with suppressed anger, and there was a dangerous light in his eye.

His lips quivered as he spoke, while his voice was thick with suppressed passion.

"Do not think for an instant, Mr. Herbert Rochfort," he began in a half-hissing tone, "that you are going to frighten me with your subtle threats! I have been your tool long enough without profiting much by it. I'll be it no longer!"

"You won't?" sneered the other coldly.

"You heard my words."

"Which mean as much as the wind."

"You may find that they mean a good deal more before you are done with me, sir!"

"What can you do?"

"You will find out one of these days."

"That is very indefinite. You are as powerless as a child, George Meredith," cried Rochfort.

"I may have more power than you imagine."

Rochfort laughed derisively.

"You amuse me," he laughed.

"Perhaps your amusement may turn to tragedy before you are aware of it."

"What do you mean?"

And Rochfort sprang to his feet and glared menacingly at him.

"You taunt me with weakness. You may find ere long that I am strong," rejoined Meredith coolly.

"Wherein, pray, lies your strength?"

"I have one ally that I can always rely upon, at least."

"What is that?"

"Justice."

"You appeal to justice?" sneered Rochfort.

"No. But there is such a thing as supplying justice with desirable information."

"What! you dare to threaten to betray me to my very face?" raved the tall man.

"Yes."

The next instant Rochfort had him by the throat and was shaking him as a terrier does a rat.

Thad looked on with amusement.

But matters looked a little serious for a few seconds.

Rochfort was the other's superior in strength, and it looked as though something serious might grow out of the melee, when Meredith, with a dextrous wriggle released himself from the tall man's clutch, sprang back and the next instant a knife gleamed in the light.

The smaller man was crouched, his eyes blazed with fury and he was evidently preparing to spring upon his antagonist, but

the large man's coolness never for an instant forsook him.

He regarded his little adversary with a placid air, and finally in the coolest manner possible said:

"Come, my boy, this is all child's play. Put away your silly knife. You and I cannot afford to quarrel. We have too much in common. Here, take my hand and accept my friendship. You are the victor, and I admire your bravery."

The little fellow was evidently flattered by the eulogy, and after a little morose hesitation, accepted the proffered hand.

"Now let us go," observed the big man. "The carriage has been at the door for some time."

Five minutes later they were rolling away in the direction of Mr. Myers's residence, with Thad mounted on behind like any other footman.

CHAPTER XIII.

AN IMPORTANT DISCOVERY.

As the carriage flew along Thad tried his utmost to overhear the conversation going on inside, from his place up behind, but either the vehicle made too much noise for him to hear anything, or the men remained silent during the greater part of the journey.

When the vehicle pulled up before the house, however, Thad heard Rochfort say:

"Shall we both go in, George?"

"That depends upon circumstances," replied Meredith. "If the old party is there, yours truly is not in it, but if he is not, yours truly would be glad to meet his auntie."

"In that case yours truly will probably not see his auntie," rejoined the tall man, laughing, "for this is about his time for dining, I should judge."

"His usual time, yes, but I heard this afternoon that he was going out of town. If he went the coast will be clear."

"We can soon find out," observed the tall man.

And then putting his head out of the window he called to the detective:

"James!"

Thad was down and at the side of the carriage in a twinkling.

"Sir?"

"Ring the bell and ask for Mr. Myers. If the footman says he is at home, announce my name and return. If he says that he is not at home, ask for Mrs. Myers and announce Mr. Rochfort and Mr. Meredith. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"Go."

"Yes, sir."

Thad mounted the stoop and a few moments later returned to announce that Mr. Myers was not at home, but that Mrs. Myers was, and would be happy to see them.

"Luck is still with us, old boy," laughed Rochfort, as the two men alighted.

"Yes, if it will only remain with us," responded the other somewhat despondently.

"Keep a stiff upper lip."

A moment later the two men entered the house.

Thad was in a quandary what to do.

He would have given anything to have been able to get inside the house, but how do it he could not think.

While he was raking his brain over the matter the banker's valet came out of the area and walked up on the sidewalk.

The detective, who had resumed his place on the rear of the carriage, beckoned for him to come to him.

After a little hesitation, the footman approached him.

He was a well-built fellow and about Thad's own size.

"I don't wish to be impertinent," said the detective, when he had dismounted and met the other footman, "but are you going any place in particular?"

"No," replied the other stiffly, after eyeing Thad for a moment. "Why do you ask?"

"The fact is, I have a girl in that house that I would like to see very much, but if it is worth five dollars to you to exchange coats and hats with me and take my place here for a few minutes, you are welcome to the

money and you will be doing a fellow-servant a good turn besides. What do you say?"

As he ceased speaking the detective held a crisp five-dollar bill toward the other footman.

The fellow hesitated, and then added:

"Who is your girl? What's her name?"

As luck would have it, Thad had noticed a very pretty maid with a very red head of hair and rosy cheeks, and had heard her called Susie, the day he called at the house with Dawson.

"Susie," replied Thad, promptly.

The footman smiled.

"You'd better look out for the coachman if you go about Susie," he responded.

"I have no fear of the coachman," retorted Thad, "if I can only get a peep at Susie."

"Well," rejoined the fellow, taking the bill and putting it into his pocket, "you need have no fear of the coachman this evening, as he has gone away into the country with master."

"Good! Where will I be apt to find Susie?"

"She's very apt to be in her young mistress's room on the second floor, first room to the right. Go in through the area, and as it's not over light in the house, nobody'll know but it's me."

"Thanks. Now for the coat and hat."

The footman glanced about him to make sure that nobody was in sight, and then stepping into the shadow of the carriage, divested himself of his livery.

Thad did the same thing and the change was soon effected.

The footman took up his position on the carriage and the detective slipped into the house by way of the area.

Gliding along the hall to the stairway, he mounted it and was on the second floor.

Rapping lightly at the door described by the footman, he was answered by a timid voice, which said:

"Come in."

Opening the door, the detective saw the little maid sitting by a lamp sewing.

At sight of Thad she sprung to her feet and appeared on the point of screaming, but he put her at her ease by smiling benignly and saying:

"Don't be afraid of me, my dear. I came from your mistress, Miss Estelle."

This was all a venture, for he did not know for certain whether she was Estelle's maid or not, but the shot was well aimed and hit the mark.

"Oh," she exclaimed. "Have you seen her?"

"Yes," replied Thad.

"Where is she?" asked the girl, eagerly.

"I'm not to tell just yet, my dear, but she says that if you will be very good and do just what I tell you, she will let you know where she is to-morrow and let you come to her."

"Oh, I'm so glad!" cried the girl rapturously. "I'm so anxious to see her! What does she want me to do?"

Thad had stepped inside the room and closed the door.

"She wants you to give me a copy-book she has. The paper is very yellow. It is like this," he went on, taking out the letter which had accompanied the money and unfolding it.

The girl took the sheet and looked at the paper, the detective being careful to hand it to her with the written side down.

"Oh, yes, I know," she said, handing the letter back. "Wait a minute and I'll get it for you."

A moment later she brought an old copy-book, and a very slight comparison of the paper with that upon which the letter was written was sufficient to show him that it was the book from which the sheet had been torn.

"That is it," he observed. "Thanks."

And he handed her a bright new dollar.

The girl smiled gratefully.

"Is this from Miss Estelle?" she inquired innocently.

"Yes," replied the detective.

"Please return my thanks and my love."

"With pleasure."

"What else does she want?"

"That is all. Good-night. Stay. Don't say anything about this, you know."

"Not a word," she smiled, putting her finger over her lips to denote secrecy.

Five minutes later Thad was out at the carriage again.

"Back already?" cried the footman, as Thad appeared.

"Yes."

"Did you see Susie?"

"I should say I did."

"You made a short call," laughed the footman. "Couldn't have took many kisses in that time."

"No, not many. The fact is, we heard somebody coming, and for fear of being interrupted, I made my escape."

It did not occur to the detective that he could not have got down-stairs without meeting the person, if any one had been coming up, but it did not escape the wily footman.

"How did you manage to get by them?" he laughed.

"Why, the fact is, I found that it was all a mistake after all."

"Nobody was coming up?"

"No."

"And you had your run for nothing?"

"Yes."

"That's a good one on you, lad."

"Yes, but I have a date with her."

"Aha! But here comes your master."

And the footman vanished, he and the detective having in the meantime re-exchanged wearing apparel.

Thad looked toward the house, and sure enough Rochfort and Meredith, the two sharpers, were just descending the stoop.

A glance was sufficient to show that they had met with some disappointment.

Each wore a dark scowl, and they were discussing something in an angry undertone. They entered the carriage and ordered the driver to drive down-town.

As the carriage rolled along, the detective again listened for what was being said inside, and was more successful this time.

"It is a strange thing that she knows nothing about where Estelle has gone," he heard Meredith say.

"What is puzzling me is, don't she know? My opinion is that she is playing us for a couple of suckers."

"Do you think so?"

"It looks very much like it. If she intended to do the right thing, why couldn't she make a divide row as well as later? I am getting sick of this thing."

"So am I," rejoined Meredith. "After all, you have no one to blame but yourself. You would insist upon letting her have the money, against my advice."

"Because I thought it would be safe there," growled Rochfort. "Besides, as I told you at the time, if anything should miss fire, the suspicion would all be thrown in that direction."

"Very well planned," sneered Meredith, "but you see now how it has turned out. If she so wills it, we will never get a sou of the money, and we dare not say a word."

"Well, she will see whether I will say nothing, unless she ponies up pretty soon."

"What can you do or say?"

"Never mind. I will make such a noise that she will wish she had never tried to thwart Herbert Rochfort."

"With the result of getting yourself, and perhaps me, into the toils."

"I'll risk that," retorted the tall man hotly. "I'll swing before I will be done up by a woman."

"It is all very well to talk," interposed Meredith in a calm voice. "But listen to me. That woman is as subtle as Satan. More than that, she has somebody behind her who is not only equally subtle, but who has a wonderful power. You wonder at the disappearance of Estelle and Dixie. Since what I have heard this evening, I no longer wonder at it at all. That woman not only knows all their movements as well as our own, but they also know it."

"How do you know this?" asked Rochfort in a startled voice.

"From what I have seen and heard to-day, especially to-night."

"Well?"

"You thought, and I thought that this detective who was on our scent some time ago had abandoned the case."

"And hasn't he?"

"By no means."

"How do you know?"

"Listen and I will tell you. You employed a footman this morning, didn't you?"

"Well, what of it?"

"He was in the room dressing you when I came in and heard the whole of our conversation."

"Well?"

"Any one except a blind man must have noticed that he was deeply interested in all we said."

"At least you imagine so."

"I thought it was all imagination on my part at the time, and would probably have gone thinking the same thing to the end of time but for something that happened while we were in the house."

"You astonish me," declared the Sharper, growing terribly interested. "Go on."

"Being so well acquainted with my uncle's household, I knew that there was nobody in the house but the female servants except my uncle's valet. As we came in, if you remember, he was standing in the area."

"Yes."

"We had not been in the drawing-room long before I heard some one walking through the hall and afterward ascend the stairs, and it was not a woman's footsteps."

"It was the valet's, most likely."

"So I thought for the moment. But when I came to think the matter over, I remembered that he would never think of going up-stairs unless my uncle was up there, and I at once surmised that something was wrong. As you doubtless remember, I excused myself and went out at one time during our interview with my aunt."

"I remember."

"Well, when I got into the hall my first action was to go to the front door and look out to ascertain whether your valet was there or not."

"Was he?" asked Rochfort with deep concern.

"At first glance I thought he was, as some one was sitting on behind the carriage, but as I looked more closely I discovered that it was my uncle's valet. My suspicions were confirmed, and I thought of going up-stairs and ascertain whether your man had gone up or not, but I had taken but a step or two when I heard the door of Estelle's room open, and I had barely time to dodge behind the railing of the stairs when your man started down-stairs."

"Are you sure that it was he?"

"Am I sure that you are sitting beside me? Of course I am sure. From my place of concealment I had a perfect view of his face, while he could not see me in the darkness. Now if he is not a detective, and the same one that was first working upon the case, I'll agree to eat my head."

The Sharper laughed.

"You have been simply making an ass of yourself, George," he said. "That fellow is no more a detective than you are. He is too stupid for that. I am not to be deceived in human nature. If he went up-stairs, it was because he probably knows Estelle's maid. The very fact of the other valet taking his place while he went up proves that."

"Well, you may go on thinking so, but as for me, I shall be very cautious what I say in his presence."

CHAPTER XIV.

CONFLICTING CLUES.

This conversation determined Thad in his course.

As Meredith already suspected him, it would only be a question of time when the other would discover his identity. So, whatever he was to do must be done quickly.

In spite of Rochfort's pretense of not suspecting the detective of being anything but the footman he appeared, Thad noticed, on reaching the house after returning from the visit to Mrs. Myers, that the tall man required very little of his services, and appeared anxious to get the so-called footman out of his presence as soon as possible.

Thad concluded that something more than the two men had spoken of had happened, for they had started out with the avowed intention of going to dine somewhere, instead of which they returned home without stopping anywhere.

Meredith only stopped at the house a few

minutes after their return, and whatever conversation passed between him and Rochfort was in private and Thad had no opportunity of hearing any of it.

Thad called at the tall man's door once after Meredith left, but Rochfort would not even open the door to him, and told him in very plain language, plentifully interlarded with profanity, that he might go to blazes, whereupon the detective went to his own room, but not to remain long.

In a twinkling he had removed his livery and replaced it with his own suit, and then quietly slipped out of the house.

It was now nearly nine o'clock, and raining.

Calling a cab, he had himself driven to the house on Hicks street, Brooklyn, as rapidly as possible.

Arrived at the boarding-house of Mrs. Wright, he jumped out and ran in.

In another minute he was at Dawson's door.

"Come, old fellow," he called. "We have no time to spare."

Dawson, who was sitting in the dark, plunged in deep meditation, started up at the sound of the detective's voice.

"What is it?" he demanded.

"Don't stop to ask useless questions, but come on."

Without pausing for any more explanation, the young man got his hat and was soon in the street with the detective.

It was not till then that Dawson noticed that, to all appearances, he was not with the same man that he supposed he was, and hesitated.

"What does this mean?" he cried.

"Never mind," laughed Thad, understanding the cause of his consternation, "get into the cab and I will explain as we go along. We have no time to talk now."

"But I do not know you," persisted Dawson, still staring at the detective. "I never saw you before."

"Don't be a fool! Get into the cab, and I will explain all. My name is Goodale, only I am disguised. I have important news for you. Hurry and get in."

The young man was still incredulous, but there was something about Thad's voice that no one could resist, and he finally reluctantly entered the vehicle.

Thad gave the order to drive to Rochfort's house in Fifty-seventh street, and the cab dashed away.

"I don't understand it," observed Dawson, half musingly, as they went along. "You were an old man yesterday, it seemed, and now you appear to be a young man."

The secret-searcher laughed good-naturedly.

"That is easily accounted for," he rejoined. "A gray beard gives a man an elderly appearance, and as I had reason for not appearing the same as I did yesterday I shaved it off."

"And your eyebrows were also gray, whereas they are now as free from gray as my own."

"Ah, my friend, art does a great deal toward changing a man's appearance, and until a man is able to make himself up to appear as anything from a youth of fifteen to a man of eighty he has no business in the detective service."

"Then, as I take it, you were disguised yesterday."

"Possibly."

"And are not the person you represent yourself as being?"

"That may also be, but if you remember, you gave me your word that you would trust me, and, as you put it, follow me to the end of the earth."

Dawson was silent a moment, and then resumed:

"So I did, and I will keep my word."

"Now you talk like a man again, and I will tell you what I have done."

He then went on to give an account of his experience as a footman, what he had learned, and wound up by saying:

"I have discovered where the ten thousand dollars came from, I think."

"What?" cried the young man, eagerly.

"There is little doubt in my mind now that the money came from Mrs. Myers."

"You don't mean to say that you believe her to be mixed up in this plot?" cried Dawson, almost frantically.

"If she is not at the bottom of it, I am greatly mistaken."

"Impossible!"

"Nothing of the kind. I heard enough to-night to convince me that she is the prime mover in it, and it was she, if I do not greatly mistake appearances, that sent you the ten thousand dollars."

"What leads you to believe that?"

"You remember the letter accompanying the money was written upon a leaf torn from a copy-book?"

"Yes."

"I have found the copy-book—have it in my pocket, now."

"Was it her copy-book?"

"No, it was the property of Estelle."

"Why, then, do you imagine her mother sent the money?"

"The thing is simple enough. The old lady, wishing to conceal the identity of the letter as much as possible, went into her daughter's room after her departure and, rummaging about, ran across the copy-book. This, she thought, would be the very thing, for no one would ever think of looking in her daughter's room for the source of that sheet of paper. Very well. The banker has a type-writer in the house for his convenience when he wishes to dictate any correspondence at home instead of going to his office. The lady seizes the opportunity when no one is about, to go into his private study and, making use of the machine herself, composed and wrote the letter which you received."

"This all appears feasible enough, but why should she have used the leaf out of the copy-book, which gave the letter a sort of character by which it could be traced, instead of using a sheet of plain paper that would have been impossible to identify?"

"Ah, there is just the point. Perhaps the paper in the office was all marked with the printed heading of the banker or at least his monogram, or, as is frequently the case with the stationery of these wealthy men, perhaps it contained a water-mark in the paper which could not be obliterated."

"Since you mention it, Mr. Myers's stationery is all so marked," interposed Dawson.

"Therefore you see the importance of procuring a sheet of paper the origin of which she imagined impossible to trace. A man would never do anything of the kind. He would have seen at once that a detective would have no difficulty in tracing it up. But she doubtless argued that, having used such precaution about the writing and transmission of the letter, a detective would be able to find no starting point. See how cautious she was not to send any of the money stolen from the bank. But here we are."

The driver, according to instructions, had stopped on the corner, half a block from Rochfort's house.

The two men alighted and advanced in the direction of the house, but before they had gone very far Thad noticed that a close carriage stood in front of the door.

He had no more than had time to call attention to it, when the driver whipped up and the carriage rolled away.

Thad could only surmise whether the vehicle had brought visitors to the house or was conveying some one away, and during the brief space in which he took to deliberate the rapidly retreating carriage had lost itself in the distance.

Again they started on their way toward the house, and were within a few doors of the stoop, when a second carriage, coming down the avenue, stopped in front of the house, and the driver jumped down from his box and running up the steps, rung the bell.

The door was opened and a word apparently exchanged between the driver and some one who came to the door.

And then the coachman returned to the carriage and mounted the box.

"Let us get back to our cab as soon as possible," whispered the detective, grasping Dawson's arm.

They hurried along, and meanwhile the carriage had bowed on down the street.

As it had to pass the cab, Thad and his companion had ample time to reach their vehicle, get in and follow before the carriage had got much the start of them.

The carriage kept on down the avenue for

a block or two, and then turned off on a side street and went toward the East River.

It only went as far as Fourth avenue, however, when it turned up-town, and continued in this direction until it reached Ninety-first street, when it again turned east and went to the Astoria Ferry.

"Where can they be going in this direction?" queried the detective, half musingly.

"Who?" asked Dawson eagerly.

"The occupants of that carriage."

"I know, but—"

"Well, as a matter of fact, I know as little as the man in the moon who it is, but my impression is that the first carriage went the same way; that it contained Rochfort, and possibly Meredith, and that this second one contains some one who is following him or them."

"Might not both carriages be occupied by friends who had called upon Rochfort?"

"No, because if such had been the case the occupant or occupants of the second one would have entered the house instead of merely sending the coachman to the door. My theory is that the first carriage contained Rochfort, at least; that he had some motive for leaving the house at this late hour, possibly an appointment with the occupant of the second carriage, and that it was more in keeping with their purpose to meet somewhere on the other side of the river than in New York. That the occupant of the second carriage, not being confident that Rochfort would keep his appointment, called at his house to make sure before venturing on the journey on such a night as this."

By this time they had reached the ferry and the cab drove onto the boat close behind the carriage.

Fifteen minutes later carriage and cab (the only vehicles aboard) drove ashore.

The carriage rolled away along the dark, muddy streets of Astoria, and the cab-driver, according to instructions, kept it in view.

Thus it kept on for a half-mile after leaving the ferry, and at last stopped, in front of a fine country house surrounded by a high brick wall.

The carriage was the distance of half a block ahead of the cab when it stopped, and, allowing time for the occupants to alight and get inside the house, Thad and his companion also alighted and proceeded on foot.

The driver of the carriage had already drawn his water-proof up around his ears and settled himself for a nap when the detective reached him, and it was with an ill-natured glare that he met Thad when he came alongside and addressed him.

"Who did you bring out in this carriage?" demanded the detective.

"That's my business," retorted the driver sharply.

Realizing that argument or threats would only delay matters and probably create a disturbance which would spoil everything, Thad concluded to try another way.

"Of course it's your business, my good man," he rejoined good-naturedly, "but I have a curiosity to know, and, as it can harm nobody, I am willing to pay a couple of dollars for the information. What do you say?"

This seldom failing alternative failed in this instance.

The driver straightened himself up, glared down at the detective more savagely than before and retorted:

"If ye don't get along away from here I'll call for help, and it will cost you more than two dollars for your pains."

Thad knew that the fellow would do just what he threatened, and deemed it best to let the fellow alone and gain his information in some other way.

It would be necessary to get inside of the wall and approach the house, but it would not be possible to pass through the gate while the hackman was there to watch, so the two men followed along the wall in the hope of finding a place where it could be scaled.

The night was so dark that they could only judge of the height of the wall by the dark line of the parapet as it loomed against the leaden sky.

Finally they came to the angle at the terminus of the grounds, and here the wall was joined by a low stone wall which formed the inclosure of the next lot.

"Here is our chance," observed Thad.

With which he mounted the low wall. Springing upward, he caught the edge of the high wall and drew himself up and was soon on top of it. "Come on," he said in a low voice.

"You aren't going to climb over, are you?" objected Dawson, hesitating.

"Why not?"

"You are running great risks."

"No greater than I run every day. Come on. Or would you prefer that I should go alone?"

Fear, in the common acceptance, was a thing that never troubled Dawson very much, and he would never have it said that he did not dare to go anywhere that another man would dare to go, so without a word, he also mounted the wall and Thad pulled him up to the top of the high wall.

But their worst difficulty was yet to come.

It was as black as a dungeon on the inside of the wall and there was no telling what the consequences of a jump might be.

Bracing himself on the wall, Thad said:

"Now, take my hands and I will let you down as far as possible, and the jump will not be great from that point."

The young man obeyed and he was soon down upon the ground on the inside of the wall.

As he had met with no obstruction, the detective dropped from the top of the wall without assistance.

The house was in darkness except a light at a window on the second floor.

"There is probably where the conference is going on," observed the detective, pointing up at the lighted window, "and we must get up there at all hazards."

But the difficulty was to get up there.

Thad tried successfully all the doors and windows on the ground floor, but to no purpose. They were all locked.

"How unfortunate it was that I was compelled to start upon this expedition so unexpectedly," he mused. "I have not a skeleton key or anything else with which to turn a bolt, and yet in there is probably the solution of the mystery, and we are cut off from it by a few inches of brick and mortar."

CHAPTER XV.

A SAD DISCOVERY.

As the detective stood looking up at the lighted window an idea suddenly came to him.

Back of the house and extending for some distance away, was an orchard.

He knew that there were always ladders in orchards, and said:

"I have no doubt there is a ladder in that orchard some place, but it would be like looking for a needle in a haystack to hunt for it to-night."

"However, as that is the only hope, we may as well try it," rejoined Dawson.

"Very well, you go one way and I will go another."

And the men started off.

Dawson had no more than reached the corner of the house, however, when he ran against the very thing he was looking for, and called the detective back.

The ladder was carried and placed against the wall, and Thad mounted it, but when he reached the top he found that he was at least six feet short of the window.

Descending again, he said to his companion:

"You go up and when you reach the top I will raise the ladder high enough for you to see in at the window."

Dawson climbed the ladder, and when he was at the top, Thad caught hold of the bottom rung and raised the ladder six feet from the ground, cautiously allowing the top to glide up the wall till it reached the window-sill.

When he had done so Dawson took another step higher and peeped in the window.

The next instant he uttered a piercing cry and rolled from the ladder to the ground as though he had been shot.

Fortunately the howling of the blast carried his voice away so that it could not have been heard inside.

Thad dropped the ladder and ran to his

companion, whom he supposed dead, but the young man was on his feet by the time he reached him.

"What is the matter? Are you hurt?" asked the detective anxiously.

The young man looked wildly about, but made no reply.

"What did you see?" demanded Thad.

"See?" cried Dawson dreamily.

"Yes, in the window."

"My God! I saw her!"

"That is what I expected," replied Thad coolly.

"You expected it?"

"Yes. Did I not tell you that I believed she was at the bottom of the whole scheme?"

"Estelle?"

"Great Heaven! no, her mother. You did not see Estelle in there, I hope?"

"Yes—alone with Meredith!"

Thad was stunned more than he cared to admit.

He had expected to find Mrs. Myers, whom he had reason to believe to be a prime mover in the plot which had resulted in the robbery of the bank, the murder of the assistant cashier and the attempted ruin of Dawson, but it was the last thing he had dreamed of that he should find Estelle, whom he believed pure and innocent.

"You must have made a mistake," he cried. "Remember, you were excited, and might have been deceived."

"No, I am not mistaken," protested Dawson. "I was a little excited, I admit, but I could not be mistaken in the form of that girl."

"Still, I think there must be some mistake."

"I wish to God I could think so. Unfortunately, I am too well aware that there is no mistake possible. And this is the girl who only a few days ago protested that she loved me, and you assured me that she did. How do you reconcile this conduct of hers to what you and she then assured me, sir?"

"My only answer is, that there is still a chance of a mistake. If there is not, then I am at a loss to explain the mystery."

"Let us go," cried the young man lugubriously. "We, at least I, have seen enough."

"No, we will not go until I have convinced you that you have made a mistake or myself that you have not."

"How are you going to prove it?"

"By going up and seeing for myself."

"It is useless. You will only confirm what I have told you. But I shall not only prove it, but have my revenge."

As he spoke he started toward the house.

"What are you going to do?" demanded Thad, grasping his arm with a vise-like grip.

"I am going to get into that house, if I have to batter the door down to do it. I shall rush into their presence, put them to the blush and kill both of them and then myself."

"You will do nothing of the kind."

"Who will prevent me?"

"I will."

"Do you dare to deter me, sir? I am determined. This last wrong shall be washed out in blood!"

"You are mad, man."

"Perhaps I am, but my mind is made up, and no power can stop me!"

Meanwhile, however, the detective held him as though he had been an infant.

"Listen to reason, my friend," pleaded Thad. "If you proceed in this way you will ruin everything."

"I care not. I have nothing more to lose."

"But I have, and will not permit you to spoil my plans by your rashness."

The detective spoke earnestly and with a sternness that admitted of no doubt of his sincerity.

"I will avenge myself," persisted Dawson.

"Very well, but do it like a man, not like a child."

"Sir?"

"I repeat it, like a child. You will rush into the house like a maniac. You are unarmed. If Meredith does not shoot you down on the spot, as he would have a right to do, you will have a hand-to-hand scuffle with a man who is your superior physically, and while you are thus engaged Estelle will run away, get into her carriage and drive off."

Meanwhile Meredith would overpower you and make his escape."

"And you would not assist me?"

"No, if you insist upon disobeying my orders."

"What shall we do?"

"As I said. I will go up and investigate for myself. Do you think you can hold the ladder with me on it?"

"Yes."

And the young man, with a strength a moment before he would not have believed himself possessed of, grasped the ladder.

"Mount," he cried passionately.

Thad was soon scaling the ladder.

As soon as he had reached the top, Dawson raised the ladder as Thad had done, and pushed it up as far as it would go for the ledge.

This brought the detective's head far enough above the ledge to allow him to look in the window.

A glance was sufficient to show him that Dawson had not been mistaken.

The Sharper was lolling in an easy-chair at one side of the room, a supercilious smile on his face, while Estelle stood in the center of the room, still wrapped in her water-proof and with her hat on.

Her beautiful face was a picture of scorn and loathing for the man before her, and she was talking in a rapid and animated manner.

Every now and then Meredith would shrug his shoulders and say in a careless, drawling voice:

"I cannot help it. I can do nothing for you."

They were evidently quarreling, thought the detective, but it was not a lover's quarrel, and he was puzzled to understand the meaning of the scene before him.

As she continued, the girl became more earnest and vehement. Her face was flushed, and her eyes flashed angrily.

Meredith was seen to shudder at times as though she had said something which had struck home, and again he would appear to be wrought up to a passion and scowled darkly, and appeared to be uttering some imprecation or threat.

At length he arose and addressed her for some moments in a passionate manner, meanwhile gesticulating wildly, at which the girl appeared to quail and tremble, and finally her whole bearing and aspect changed.

She no longer appeared angry or resentful, but seemed to be pleading and beseeching him for something, and once or twice appeared on the point of falling upon her knees.

At length he went to a drawer and took therefrom a bundle of papers and threw them on the table before her.

Estelle took them up and looked them over as if searching for some special one.

Finally she selected three and pulled them from the package. Then it was that Thad recognized what they were.

They were pawn-tickets.

As soon as she had selected the tickets from the package and put them into her pocket, the girl made toward the door as if on the point of leaving the room.

Meredith took up the lamp from the table and started after her, as though he intended to light her down-stairs.

Thad realized that there was nothing more to see, and quickly descended from the ladder.

What could be at the bottom of this mystery? he mused. There was evidently some dark mystery connected with those pawn-tickets.

Taking Dawson's arm without a word, the detective drew him toward the front of the house where, concealed in the shrubbery, they had a view of the front door and the gate at the same time.

Presently the front door opened and Estelle came out, followed by Meredith, who opened the gate for her.

As she passed out, she turned and glanced at Meredith, although it was too dark for our friends to tell what the expression of her face was, and he extended his hand, but she refused it and turned away.

"That is one satisfaction, anyway," observed Dawson.

The moment she was outside of the gate, Meredith closed and locked it and then returned to the house.

Meanwhile our friends heard the carriage roll away.

"Well," said Thad, when Meredith had entered the house, "we may as well go, and as this fellow has locked the gate, we will be compelled to climb again."

"What is to hinder us from using the ladder?" objected Dawson.

"That's so, we can use that. Fetch it along."

Dawson carried the ladder to the wall at a point some distance from the gate, and the two men were soon on top of the wall, from which it was a simple matter to get down on the outside.

They started along in the direction of their cab, but had gone but a short distance when they heard some one unlocking the gate.

Stopping close to the wall where the shadow was very dense, they watched, and were soon rewarded by seeing a man come out and walk away toward the river at a rapid gait.

"That is Meredith," remarked Thad, as they resumed their walk. "He is evidently going to tell Rochfort the result of the interview here to-night."

"Probably. But what puzzles me is, who occupied that first carriage? I expected to find Rochfort out here."

"So did I, but it must have been Meredith who came away from the house."

"But I thought you said he left before you did."

"So he did."

Thad then related the account of the pawn-tickets.

"What can it mean?" queried the young man.

"I am unable to even surmise," rejoined the detective, "although I am satisfied that there is something dark back of it."

"Do you imagine Estelle has anything to do with it?"

"Not designedly. My impression is that whatever connection she may have with the affair is forced upon her through the influence you heard me hint at the other day. Estelle is evidently the victim of some malign influence which controls her completely and from which she is unable to extricate herself."

"Then we must assist her to escape."

"That shall be our mission, my boy. That, and the proving of your innocence, are the incentives of my work."

"Oh thank you, sir," cried Dawson, grasping his hand warmly. "I do not know how I shall ever repay you for your kindness!"

"It is not a kindness, my boy. It is merely and simply my duty, and it will give me as much pleasure to succeed as it will you."

By this time they had reached their cab, which was standing where they had left it.

"Did you think we had deserted you?" asked Thad, addressing the driver as they climbed in.

"No, sir," replied the driver, gathering up his reins. "You was not gone long, but I had an offer to drive a party back to town just now."

"A man on foot?"

"Yes, sir."

"He wanted you to drive him to the city, did he?"

"Yes, sir, and offered me a dollar fare. I told him that four fares wouldn't be no inducement."

"There's a hint for you," whispered Dawson, nudging Thad.

"I see the drift of his argument," laughed the detective. "But as he is getting about five fares for this trip, his honesty is decidedly commendable."

Both men were silent for some moments and the cab rumbled away toward the ferry.

Finally Thad asked:

"Where does Meredith stop in the city? The place we have just left is evidently his country seat."

"Yes, this is his country seat, and when in the city he has chambers in Eleventh street, not far from where mine were, only around the corner."

"You would have no trouble in finding the place, I presume?"

"None whatever. Do you think of going there to-night?"

"No, not to-night. I will return to Rochfort's, get into my livery and try to discover

something about what this visit of Estelle to Meredith in the country means."

"You will have some trouble about getting back, won't you?"

"No. I took the precaution to provide myself with a key to the area door."

Half an hour later the driver put the detective down within half a block of Rochfort's house in Fifty-seventh street and, after instructing the driver to drive Dawson to his Brooklyn boarding-house, he made his way on foot to the house, let himself in with the night-key and sought his room, which he was fortunate enough to reach without being discovered.

Donning his livery and making his toilet carefully, the detective descended to the room of Rochfort.

Although it was long after midnight, there was a light in the room and he could hear some persons talking.

Rapping softly at the door, he answered the summons to enter by stepping in.

Meredith was there, and they were engaged in earnest conversation.

CHAPTER XVI.

ALMOST A TRAGEDY.

BOTH Rochfort and Meredith appeared to have forgotten their suspicions of the new footman, for neither of them paid any attention to him when he entered.

He stood respectfully awaiting the commands of his master, and finally asked what he would have.

Rochfort replied by telling him to bring a decanter of liquor, which the valet hastened to obey.

Thad took a good deal of time in reaching the door on going out, and a good deal more time in getting from the door to the table near which the men were sitting and setting the tray down, and during all that time his ears were wide open to all that was being said.

What he heard, however, was of very little account to him.

He learned, first, that the two men were extremely well pleased with the result of the visit of Estelle to Meredith, and second, that Rochfort was betrothed to Estelle and intended marrying her the following week.

As soon as he put the liquor on the table, Thad was ordered to leave the room, and that was the end of his discovery, except what little he could catch through the key-hole, but he heard nothing that threw any light upon the mystery he was endeavoring to unravel.

After he had returned to his room and gone to bed the detective lay awake for a long time pondering over the events of the day, and the many strange events that had happened since he went to work upon the case, and he finally summed up that the case was more mysterious now than when he commenced on it.

The night's work, particularly, had only resulted in deepening the mystery.

What had appeared tolerably plain before was now more difficult of solution than some things which were the deepest mysteries to begin with.

Up to that night he had supposed Estelle innocent of any complicity in the crime, but suspected that her mother had something to do with it. From what he had seen to-night, however, it looked as though the daughter was mixed up in it also.

Thus the night passed and no sleep came to him till the sun was high in the heavens, and then he dropped off into a short nap, from which he was suddenly awakened by some one knocking at his door.

Supposing it was his master, he sprang out of bed and opened the door.

To his surprise he found a woman there.

She was so muffled up that it was impossible for him to recognize her, although he thought at once that he had seen that one eye which peeped forth from the folds of her wrappings.

He was considerably embarrassed, but holding the door so as to conceal his night clothes, he peeped out and asked her what she wanted.

"You must leave this house at once, Mr. Burr," said the woman. "Do not stop another hour. They have planned to kill you and may carry it out any time."

The detective was mystified.

Was this a plot to intimidate him and

deter him from proceeding with his case, or had these men actually made up their minds to put him out of the way?

Besides, he asked himself, who was this woman that had come to his rescue? She could not be anybody connected with the house, otherwise she could not have known his name.

"How do you know this?" he asked in the same low tone that she had employed.

"I heard them lay the plot last night,"

"Who are you?"

"Dixie."

Now he was thunderstruck.

How had she managed to overhear such a plot? Where had she been that she should have heard them talking?

This all flashed through his mind in a second or two, but while he hesitated the girl repeated:

"Do not wait a moment. You may have waited too long already. I must also hasten away, for if I am found here they will kill me."

"How did you get into the house?"

"Do not stop to ask questions now," she commanded impatiently. "When we are away from here I will explain all."

"Very well, I will follow your advice, little one. But remember, if you deceive me it will be the worst for you."

She made no other reply than to shrug her shoulders and make an impatient gesture for him to hurry.

The detective returned to the room and was soon dressed and ready to depart.

When he got into the hall Dixie was nowhere to be seen, nor, indeed, was any one else at that early hour, and he had no trouble in getting out of the house unobserved.

He confidently expected, to find the little woman waiting for him when he reached the street, but in this he was disappointed. She was not in sight.

Was it possible, he thought, that she had deceived him after all?

At all events, he did not see that there was anything to be gained by returning to the house, and so he turned his footsteps down-town, and entering a cab, had himself driven to his home on Thirty-fourth street.

After partaking of a good breakfast, he sallied forth again, disguised in the same manner that he had been when he called himself Goodale.

He first called on the janitor of the house where Dawson had formerly had his lodgings to ascertain whether the messenger whom he had employed to watch for the other messenger had made any progress or not.

The boy had reported regularly every day and received his money, but thus far had not succeeded in meeting the other messenger.

Thad then called at the house where he had last seen Estelle and Dixie, in the dress-makers' establishment.

The same old woman admitted him, and he at once inquired for Estelle.

The old woman shook her head.

"You won't find her here," she said. "She left here yesterday, and we do not know where she has gone."

"Dixie is here, isn't she?" asked the detective.

"No, sir, she went too."

"With Estelle?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did they say nothing about coming back?"

"No, sir. They took all their things, and gave me to understand that they were not coming back any more. Miss Myers is to be married next week, you know."

"Then she must have gone home."

"I do not think so, because her maid was here last night inquiring for her."

Here was a poser.

Where could the two women have gone? And if Estelle was to marry Rochfort, which would certainly be agreeable to Mrs. Myers, why had she not gone home? Again, if she was to marry Rochfort, and Dixie was friendly enough with her, why had the latter come to warn the detective that his life was in danger?

Thad was disgusted.

He had worked many cases, but this was most puzzling one he had ever tackled.

Th further he went in it the more mys-

terious and difficult of solution it appeared to grow.

He was walking along the street after leaving the house pondering the strange case, and had almost concluded to abandon it, when he was suddenly recalled to his senses by hearing his name called by some one at his very elbow.

Looking around he beheld a diminutive woman closely veiled.

She broke out into a wicked little laugh at the perplexity with which he appeared to be trying to discover who she was.

"Don't you know me?" she asked, with another little laugh.

"Oh, is that you, Dixie?"

"Why, of course. Didn't you know me?"

"How could I through that veil?"

"That's so. Well, you concluded to take my advice and leave that house, I see."

"Yes, although I do not know but I had as well have remained."

"And be killed?"

"There was no danger of that, I guess."

"Yes, there was. You would not have been alive now, if you had remained."

"Why did you not wait for me this morning, then?"

"It would not have done. They are watching me too closely."

"How do you know that they had decided to killed me, Dixie?"

"I heard them planning it last night."

"Where?"

The girl hesitated.

"I dare not tell you that," she finally answered.

"Why not?"

"Because I promised Estelle that I would not tell you."

"Then she is into it, too, is she?"

"No, sir. It was she that had me go to you and tell you about it, so that you could save yourself."

"Where is she?"

"That I dare not tell either."

"Why not?"

"They would kill me."

"They would never know anything about it."

"I dare not risk it."

"Is Estelle voluntarily hiding from me?"

"By no means. She knows you are her friend, and would gladly put herself under your protection if she dared."

"What is to hinder her from doing it?"

The girl shrugged her shoulders and became greatly agitated.

"I wish you would not ask me," she finally replied. "It is no fault of hers, nor is it from fear that any harm will come to herself, but—"

Again she checked herself.

"But what?"

"Oh, do not ask me, sir," she pleaded.

"I cannot tell you."

"I understand. She is simply sacrificing herself to save others. Am I not right?"

"Perhaps you are, sir. But I cannot tell you. And I must go now. I am afraid some one will see me with you. Good-by."

And before he realized what she was about, she had turned on her heel and darted away.

"Well," he mused. "That is abrupt. However, my little miss, you shall not escape me so easily. I shall follow you and see where you go."

With that he started in pursuit.

Dixie dashed along at a rapid pace for the distance of several blocks, and if she suspected that she was being followed, she did not evince the fact.

She kept straight on down Fifth avenue, never looking to the right or left, and from all appearances intended to walk to the Battery in the same way.

Finally, however, just as she arrived at the corner of a cross street, she was met by a man who had come out of the cross street, and they stood talking for several minutes.

Thad stopped in the recess of a stoop to conceal himself where he had a good view of the couple, but the man kept his back to him all the time and he could not tell who he was. He did not appear to be either Rochfort or Meredith, either.

At length the pair turned the corner and went in the direction from which the man had come.

Thad hastened to reach the corner, but

when he did the couple had as completely disappeared as though they had sunken into the earth.

It was in vain that he reconnoitered about the street in all directions, they were nowhere to be found.

Finally he gave it up and turned his steps toward Brooklyn.

He found Dawson at the boarding-house, in a terrible state of agitation.

"What is the trouble now?" demanded the detective.

"Look at this," he cried, handing Thad a letter which he had received that morning.

The detective glanced over the letter, which was anonymous, and, like the one containing the money, written on a type-writer.

Like it, also, it pretended to be from a friend who had the greatest sympathy for the ex-cashier, and strongly advised him to leave the city.

The detective laughed.

"I shouldn't let that bother me," he observed. "You may expect any number of letters advising you to go, which only shows that your enemies are not at peace while you are here."

"What troubles me is that they should have discovered my hiding-place," complained the young man.

"That is not strange. They are a pretty keen set. They even discovered where I was, and sent Dixie to warn me to leave there, as they had sworn to kill me. We have got a crafty lot to deal with, my boy."

"That is what I conclude, so crafty that we had better let them alone. You abandon the case before they do you some injury and I will take their advice and leave the country."

"Don't think of it," cried Thad, who was now more determined than ever to beat his wily adversaries. "We will defeat them yet."

"Impossible. Besides I have no object for remaining and winning the case now."

"Why?"

"Estelle is to be married to Rochfort next week."

Thad was astounded. He had carefully refrained from mentioning the fact and was under the impression that Dawson was ignorant of it.

"How do you know this?" he asked.

"Look at this," replied the other, handing him a newspaper in which it had been printed.

To say that Thad was astonished is to put it mildly. Still, he affected to treat the matter lightly.

"It is some ruse," he declared. "Those people who are so anxious to have you leave the city have published that, thinking it will determine you to leave all the sooner. The thing shall never be consummated, my boy."

"I should like to know who is to prevent it?"

"I will!"

"But if Estelle is willing?"

"She is not!"

He then related what Dixie had told him, together with his experience with the little witch that morning.

It was finally agreed between them that Dawson should keep close to the house that day, while Thad would reconnoiter in the neighborhood of Rochfort's house in the hope of making some new discovery.

Accordingly, about nine o'clock that evening, disguised as a young dandy, Thad strolled along the street past the Sharper's house.

There were no lights in the house or other signs of life, but he had not gone far after passing the house before he became aware that he was being followed by two mysterious figures.

He crossed the street to avoid them and they appeared to have disappeared.

He sauntered on for some distance and then retraced his steps, but he had only gone a short distance when a man sprung from a dark corner with a knife in his hand, and before Thad had time to defend himself, the fellow plunged the knife into him.

CHAPTER XVII.

A CLOSE CALL.

ALTHOUGH he was pretty well satisfied that he was being followed, he had no idea that his assailants would have the temerity

to attack him in so public a place—on Fifty-seventh street, within a block of Fifth avenue, and was, therefore, unprepared.

He was fortunate enough to espy the figure of the would-be assassin as he emerged from the shadow, but his movements were so quick that the detective was unable to avoid his thrust until it was too late.

He made a spring backward as the assassin came at him, and thereby avoided anything more than a cut in the arm, but it was apparently a pretty severe one.

Moreover, being in the right arm, the limb was so numbed as to prevent the detective from using it at once, and he could not, therefore, draw his revolver.

However, he drew a knife with his left hand and placed himself on the defensive.

But this was needless, for, apparently satisfied that he had done his work, the assailant fled.

As he glided out of the shadow and ran along the street Thad thought he recognized the figure as that of Meredith!

"If it is he," mused the detective, "Rochfort cannot be far off, and they will still pursue me, as soon as they discover that they have not finished me."

Passing under a street lamp, Thad examined the wound in his arm.

It was bleeding profusely, and, although not necessarily serious, the knife had evidently penetrated to the bone.

The pain was intense, but this fact, less than the thought of being set upon in such a cowardly manner, rendered him furious.

"Curse them!" he muttered, "this will be a serious piece of business for those villains. I must be on the point of unearthing a more horrible crime than I at first imagined, since they are willing to commit another murder to cover it up."

Tearing his handkerchief into strips Burr bound up the bleeding arm with the skill of a surgeon, and then proceeded on his way.

He had not gone far, however, before he was aware that his assailants were again on his track.

And they did not appear to take any pains to conceal themselves, but walked on the same side of the street, and as he proceeded, gradually closed up on him.

He had walked over to Sixth avenue and turned down that street, and was now approaching one of the darkest and most lonely places on the street, so that, brave as he was, he could not avoid a feeling of apprehension, inasmuch as there were two to one.

However, he drew his revolver and held it ready for use, but as the two men were behind him, they had a double advantage over him.

They could take their choice of shooting him from behind or suddenly rushing upon him and finishing him with their knives.

Reaching a corner, Thad thought to give them the slip by suddenly crossing the street and retracing his steps up-town, but in this he was disappointed.

They also crossed over, and doing so, took no precaution to conceal themselves, so that as they made their way over the crossing he had a full view of them.

There could be no doubt about their identity now.

It was Rochfort and Meredith.

Maddened by the recognition of these two arch villains, the detective determined to either escape them or have it out at once, so he again crossed the street so that he came almost face to face with them.

But they evidently did not care to tackle him fairly and stopped as suddenly as though they had been paralyzed.

Thad then proceeded on his way and the two men followed, keeping but a few paces behind him.

At length he came out upon Fifth avenue not far from Forty-second street, and crossing over to the east side, came to a small saloon and eating-house.

In front of this place two policemen stood talking, and he stopped to ask them some simple question.

This compelled his pursuers, who were not more than twenty paces behind him, to stop again, and so abruptly and in such a conspicuous place that they could not avoid appearing awkward.

After a moment's conversation with the

officers, Thad again moved on, this time entering the saloon, but instead of stopping in there, he passed on back, as though seeking the toilet. But he knew that there was a gate in the rear that opened into a narrow alley or passage-way running out to the street.

As he passed through the back door the detective peered through the crack in the door and saw the men enter the saloon.

He was gratified to see that they did not observe him, and they were glancing about the room and examining the faces of the occupants of the place in search of him.

Passing quickly out of the back gate, he was soon in the passage, and a moment later on Fifth avenue again.

By this maneuver he had gained considerable distance upon his pursuers, and he took advantage of it to put as much more distance between them as possible.

Before he had gone very far an empty cab came along going down-town, and hailing it, he got in.

This, he knew, would put him entirely out of his assailants' reach, and gave him time to think what course to pursue.

He ordered the driver to take him to Brooklyn, and half an hour later the cab drew up in front of the boarding-house where Dawson was stopping.

The young man had somehow expected him, and the vehicle had no more than stopped, when he was out to meet the detective.

"What news?" were his first words.

"Let us get in the house before we talk," rejoined Thad.

Dawson then noticed that he held his arm in a peculiar way, and asked:

"Are you wounded?"

"Yes. I have a little souvenir of your friend Meredith. But it will be a dear cut for him!"

"How did it happen?" cried the other anxiously.

"He waylaid me, like the sneak that he is. But let us get into your room, where I can have some water to wash this wound, for it burns like fire."

Dawson said no more, and led the way into the house and up to his room.

He procured a basin of water, and soon had the detective's arm washed and dressed as perfectly as though he had been in the hands of a hospital surgeon.

"Now, my boy, we can talk," said Thad, resuming his wonted smile.

"In the first place," began Dawson, "I want to remark that your present disguise is more perfect, if possible, than any I have seen you wear yet. If I had not known that it was impossible for any one else to be coming here at this time of night, I would not have ventured out, and as it was, I did not dare to make a move until I had heard your voice. Now, let me ask you, what have you learned?"

"Very little," replied Thad. "I proceeded, after leaving you, to the street in which Rochfort lives, in the hope of meeting him and learning something. Well, I did meet him, but in a manner that was neither instructive nor pleasant. As I said, his friend Meredith waylaid and sprung upon me like a wild animal, and only for a remarkably quick movement on my part, I probably would not now be here to relate the circumstance."

"You know that it was Meredith that slashed you, do you?"

"Certainly, I saw him as plainly as I now see you."

"But you say that you also met Rochfort?"

"Yes. As soon as the villain struck me with the knife he ran like the coward that he is, and I felt sure that Rochfort was not far off. If I had kept on my course all might have been well, beyond this cut, but I was determined to ascertain for sure whether it was Meredith that had sprung upon me, and also to learn whether Rochfort was about or not, and to that end, retraced my steps after going some distance in the direction I had been going, when I saw the two men crossing the street so as to put themselves on the same side with me."

"And you are sure it was them?"

"Perfectly. They passed beneath a flaring light so that there could be no doubt about it."

"They took no pains to conceal their identity, then?"

"Not the slightest."

"What do you think was their object in wanting to put you out of the way?"

"To put an end to this investigation. I tell you, my boy, these fellows are bigger scoundrels than we imagined, and we have been to some extent on the wrong track."

"How is that?"

"Well, I have hitherto been under the impression that Meredith was the chief factor in this crime. I thought that Mrs. Myers had become infatuated with young Meredith, as an old woman often does with a very handsome young man like him, and that she had first passed him off as her nephew in order to get him into the house. That she had given him all the money she could, and when that failed, had given him her jewelry to pawn. This theory was borne out by the presence of the pawn-tickets. Still unable to satisfy his extravagance, she allowed, perhaps encouraged him, to rob her husband's bank."

"You astonish me."

"You will be still more astonished before we are through with this thing. This, as I say, has been my theory. But now I am at a loss to understand how Rochfort stands in the matter."

"Merely as Meredith's friend, perhaps profiting by the friendship."

"That was what I imagined. But how do you account for his remarkable influence over all of them? If it were Meredith that was going to marry Estelle the theory would do very well. But Rochfort must wield a stronger influence than that of a mere friend of Mrs. Myers's lover to induce that lady to sacrifice her daughter for him."

"Friendship goes a long way sometimes, especially if it be founded upon mutual crime. Perhaps Rochfort's knowledge of Meredith's crimes and his intimacy with the banker's wife compels the other to yield unwillingly to his desires."

"There may be something in that," rejoined the detective, thoughtfully. "I know that the friendship between the two men is anything but cordial, and I know that Meredith would like, if possible, to rid himself of Rochfort. But I believe there is some stronger hold which he has, not only upon Meredith but upon Mrs. Myers and even Estelle herself."

"What can it be?" said Dawson, eagerly.

"That is what we have to find out."

"You do not think she is guilty of complicity in the crimes of others, do you?"

"Certainly not, but I believe she is willing to sacrifice herself to shield her mother, or, as she perhaps imagines, her father, from shame."

"You still think the old lady guilty, then?"

"There is no other solution of the problem."

"But why does Estelle think she is shielding her father by doing as she does?"

"Listen. If my theory is correct, the crime was either committed by Meredith or Rochfort, probably the former, but with the knowledge and maybe the assistance of the latter. In order to commit the theft, it was necessary, first to have the money in the safe. Rochfort, being a depositor, could easily arrange that matter by demanding his money so early in the morning as to induce you to bring it out of the vault the night before. Very well. The next thing, it was necessary, to have a key to the cash-room. Nobody possessed a key but the banker and yourself. It would be impossible or impracticable for them to procure your key, but the old lady, knowing that the banker's key was kept in his secretary, contrived to get a key which would unlock the secretary. This key she gave Meredith and then got her husband off to the theater, so that the young man would have no trouble in procuring the cash-room key, using it, and replacing it in the old gentleman's absence."

"This was all very well, as far as it went. But it was necessary to fasten the suspicion on somebody else."

"Their first move was to get you to attend a dinner in company with Meredith, who was said to be on the point of going to Europe. You attended the dinner, and, as they hoped, you got drunk—too drunk to remember what happened."

"So far, so good. But there was still something else to be done. It might not be possible to prove you guilty of the crime. In that case, somebody else must be brought in. Who was that person to be? The banker himself. The old lady, infatuated with the young man and tired of the incumbrance of the old one, was willing to sacrifice him for her own ends.

"In addition to the key, which she considered would go a long way toward convicting him, there was something else. What was that something else?

"The ring!

"The double mark on the safe would indicate that he and no other had made it, from the fact of his wearing that peculiar ring."

"But as he was at the theater with her all evening, how was it possible for her to procure the ring?" objected Dawson.

"It was not necessary to procure the ring. A duplicate would answer just as well, and there would be no chance of his proving that his ring was at any time out of his possession."

"Why, then, do you not cause the arrest of the old lady?"

"Because I have nothing more than a theory so far."

"But would not the trial of the banker himself bring out these facts?"

"No, he would have no trouble in proving an *alibi*, and that would end it, and in the mean time the real criminals would have time to escape. Besides, as I say, recent developments have served to weaken my former theory. I must account for Rochfort's presence in and connection with the case. And in the light of these recent developments another matter recurs to me and appears significant. In the conversation between the two sharpeners on the day that I went into the former's service as a valet, Meredith threatened Rochfort with exposure by way of retort to a threat on the part of Rochfort to do something dreadful to the other if he did not perform certain things. I could not help but see then that Rochfort had the other to some extent in his power, while Meredith held a certain sway over him by being in possession of facts which the other would not care to have exposed."

"It is a most complicated case, Mr. Goodale," observed Dawson, "and I do not believe we will ever succeed in unraveling it."

"It is a complicated case, I admit," assented the detective, "the most complicated I ever had anything to do with. But that is not admitting that there is not still hope of unraveling the mystery. Indeed, I am as confident to night, and more determined than I was the day I started on the case."

"I certainly hope for success, and shall do nothing to retard or discourage you, but I fear we will have a struggle for it."

"So we will, as we have to struggle for everything worth having."

"What puzzles me, is how these robbers got hold of the secret word with which the safe was locked," observed Dawson thoughtfully.

At that moment there was a rap at the door, and on being opened, the landlady, who was there informed Thad that there was a lady down stairs waiting to see him.

The detective hastened down, when, to his utter astonishment, he found Dixie there.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AN IMPORTANT DISCOVERY.

Dixie arose on the detective's entrance, but from the way she looked at him he was satisfied that she did not recognize him.

Determined to carry on the ruse a little further, he approached her gravely, and disguising his voice as completely as his face was, put out his hand with the question:

"Did you wish to see me, miss?"

"No, sir," was the girl's prompt reply, as she drew back. "I desire to see another gentleman."

"What is his name?"

She hesitated and became a trifle confused.

"I am not at liberty to tell his name," she finally faltered, "although I believe he lives here."

"Well, little one, if he lives here, I ought to know him, and there is no need of conceal-

ing his name, unless he has done something of which he is ashamed."

"He has done nothing of which he is ashamed," she stammered, growing still more confused, "but he does not care to have me mention it to strangers."

"Then, I'll bet it's that detective," laughed Thad, resuming his natural voice. "He is always up to something."

She looked at him in astonishment.

"Am I not right?" he went on. "Is it not Detective Burr you are looking for?"

"Ye—yes, sir—"

"I thought so," he interrupted. "Well, little one, what can I do for you? Or rather, let me ask you what you are doing out at such a late hour as this?"

She still regarded him doubtfully.

"Are you Mr. Burr?" she finally ventured.

"That is my name, when it isn't something else, Miss Dixie," he laughed.

"Your voice seems all right, and you know me, so I guess it's all right," she said, smiling and blushing a little.

"What brings you here, Dixie?" he repeated.

She glanced about cautiously, and seeing that the landlady was in the room, glanced back significantly at the detective.

"Be good enough to leave us for a moment, will you, Mrs. Wright?" said Thad.

"Certainly," snapped the old lady, not very well pleased at being deprived of a bit of gossip, and flounced out of the room.

"You know I told you they had determined to kill you, sir," Dixie began, as soon as they were alone.

"Yes."

"Well, I have just heard them talking about it again, and Rochfort abused Meredith awfully for not killing you to-night. Meredith said he had done his best and had wounded you pretty severely, but the other wasn't satisfied with that, and said that if you were living this time to-morrow night that he (Meredith) wouldn't be."

"What did Meredith say to that?"

"He was pretty badly scared, I can tell you, and promised on his honor that you should not live another day."

"I know they have determined to kill me, little girl, and it is very kind of you to come away here to tell me, but how did you know I was here?"

"She told me."

"She?"

"Yes, Estelle."

"How did she learn it, I wonder?"

"Through Rochfort, I think."

"How did he find it out?"

"Oh, he knows wherever you go."

"How?"

"He has spies on your track all the time, so you can't make a move without he knows it."

"You don't say?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, neither you nor Estelle need lose any sleep over my danger, little girl. Those fellows will never succeed in carrying out their devilish plot."

"I hope not, but they are very powerful and have lots of influence with great people."

"So I believe. But what is the secret of Rochfort's influence over the Myers family?"

"Oh, I have not the least idea, only I know they are afraid to refuse him anything."

"And Estelle is going to marry him, is she?"

"Oh, yes, and I do wish you would try to prevent it, for I know she will be so unhappy."

"So I shall, not only try, I shall prevent it, if it costs me my life. But how does she take it? Is she much cast down about it?"

"No. She does not seem to care."

"You do not think she is going into it willingly?"

"Yes."

"Yes?"

"You see, she knows it is necessary to save her—"

"Well? To save whom?"

"No, I won't tell you," cried the little rogue. "But Estelle realizes that it is her duty, and she is willing to do it. She was cast down over it for awhile, and I used to think she would commit suicide rather than do it, but lately there has been a great change in her, and she doesn't seem to care

now. In fact, I believe she will be glad when it is over."

"Why?"

"Because she knows that there will no longer be any danger of her father—"

Again she checked herself, and, realizing that she had already gone too far, became terribly confused and blushed as red as a rose.

"Well, never mind that," laughed Thad.

"You need not tell me that she is doing this to save her father from the gallows. I know it already. But why does she wish to save me? Why does she not allow them to carry out their scheme of murdering me if they want to and can?"

"Because she knows you are her friend, and are trying to save her and her—"

"Her father. I understand. It was she that induced you to come, then, was it?"

"Partly, sir. But I was anxious to see you anyway, as there was something I wanted to tell you."

"What is that, Dixie?"

"I don't know whether you knew it or not, but the safe in the bank was locked with my name the night of the robbery."

"I am aware of the fact."

"But you did not know how the robbers found it out, did you?" she said, with an arch smile, believing she possessed something in the way of information now that he had not heard.

She was right, and it was a piece of information which he was anxious to obtain.

"No, you've got me there, Dixie," replied the detective.

"Well, I know."

"Tell me."

"The night of the robbery Alfred came home and told me that he was going out to dine with some friends. I did not like it, because he had been out nearly every night for weeks, and scolded him. Among others things, I told him that he had no regard for me. He insisted that he had, and to prove the fact, said, 'Why, Dixie, how can you say that I do not love you madly, when the safe of the bank is locked this very night with your precious name?'"

Thad thought he had made a discovery.

"And you went and told this to Meredith, did you?" he said sharply.

Dixie pouted her red lips.

"Why should I go and tell him?" she asked pettishly.

"Because he desired you to."

"He didn't desire me to, and if he had, I wouldn't have told him. The fact is, I did not see him that day, nor had I seen him for weeks."

"How, then, did the robbers get hold of the information?"

"Why, Alfred had brought a gentleman home with him, and he was sitting in the drawing-room while we were in the bedroom, where Alfred was dressing, talking. There was nothing but the *portiere* between, and the gentleman heard all that was said."

"Who was this gentleman?"

"Clarence Meredith."

"The assistant cashier?"

"Yes."

Thad's breath was almost taken away.

Added to all the other complications of this mysterious case, here was another.

This put an entirely new face on the matter.

Here at last appeared to be a motive for killing the assistant cashier.

Thad was silent for some moments, and at length resumed:

"Did he go to dinner with Dawson?"

"Meredith?"

"Yes."

"That I do not know."

"You do not remember of hearing them talking about it, do you?"

"No, sir."

"Well, is that all you have to tell me, little girl?" said Thad taking her hand.

"That's all," she replied, rising.

"How did you come to think of this matter at this time, and not think of it before?"

"I should never have thought of it again if it had not been for something that happened to-night."

"What was that?"

"Rochfort and Meredith were talking in an adjoining room and I was listening, as I wanted to hear whether they would say anything more about killing you."

"Yes."

"Rochfort had just threatened to kill Meredith if he did not put you out of the way, and that led to a quarrel. Meredith hinted that he might say something to the authorities that would put Rochfort beyond the reach of harm, and Rochfort retorted by reminding him that too much knowledge was a dangerous thing sometimes, and hinted at the fatal effect it had had on Clarence, his brother.

"For a long time I pondered in vain trying to think what he meant by Clarence having too much knowledge, and then all of a sudden it came to me."

"You think, then, that that is what he meant?"

"I'm almost positive of it."

"Well, you may be right, and if you are, the fact throws a new light upon the case. But now won't you tell me where Estelle is, little girl?"

"I cannot. Do not ask me. It may be that she will let me tell you very soon, and if she will, you shall know."

"Very well. I shall not urge you, but it would materially aid me in my work if I knew where she is."

"Well, I'll see. Good-night."

"Good-night, Dixie"

"If I don't find out where she goes this time," mused the detective as she passed out of the house, "it will be no fault of mine."

He stepped to the window and watched her to the sidewalk, and was surprised to see her enter a carriage. But that did not surprise him so much as to see a man put his head out of the window as she approached the vehicle.

What could it mean?

Was the little rogue playing him false after all?

It looked like it, for, although he did not see the man's face, (it was too dark for that), the general form of the head and the manner its owner had of managing it, led him to believe it was Rochfort.

In a twinkling he was out to the curb, and as the carriage wheeled about, the detective sprang on behind.

"Now drive to Halifax!" he mused. "I will be with you wherever you go."

The carriage dashed along at a rapid pace, but instead of going toward the bridge, it went in the opposite direction.

It kept right out that quiet residence thoroughfare, Hicks street, half a mile, and then turned into a cross street, went as far as Court street, and then, without stopping, started back toward the bridge.

It had gone some distance, and the detective had already surmised what the driver intended to do, when it was compelled to halt to allow a street car to get across the road.

Instantly Thad was at the side of the carriage.

"Hold on!" he cried. "I'll just get up with you, my man. I want you."

And before the driver was aware of it, the detective was on the box beside him.

"Now, I want you to tell me what became of that couple you drove over from New York," he commanded.

"I don't know, sor," replied the driver, who was badly frightened.

"Well, first of all, I want to tell you that I am a detective and have a right to know. Those people were in your carriage when you came over from New York, and the woman got out and went into a house on Hicks street. She came out again and appeared to get into your carriage. At the same time the man was inside, for I saw him put his head out of the window. Now, you know what became of them, and if you do not tell me, I shall have to take you down and lock you up."

"I pledge you my word I don't know what became of 'em for," protested the coachman.

"You know that they did not get in, don't you?"

"Yes, sor, I know that."

"They told you that they would simply go in one door and out the other as a blind, didn't they?"

"They did, sor."

"After which you were to drive away out where you did?"

"Yes, sor."

"Very well. Now tell me where you picked them up."

"On Broadway, sor."

"Whereabouts in Broadway?"

"Near Forty-fourth street, sor."

"You intend to pick them up down here somewhere, don't you, and drive them back to the city?"

"No, sor. All they wanted of me was to drive them over, and then when the lady came out of the house the two o' them were to get out on the opposite side of the carriage, and then I was to drive out for half a mile, and after that I was to go where I pleased."

"Very well, I will ride back with you, and if I find you are telling the truth, I will let you go, and if I find that you are not, I shall take you down and lock you up."

"Yez are welcome to ride back with me, sor, but ye'll foind that I've told yez nothing but the naked truth."

And so the detective found it.

And it was about as he had expected. The wily couple had merely used this carriage as a decoy, knowing in all reason that Thad would follow it, and, dodging into some dark corner, they had waited till they saw Thad ride away with the carriage, when they had procured another and driven back to the city, unmolested.

Thad was pretty well satisfied now that Dixie was an accomplice in the crime, and determined to watch her as closely as he was watching the others.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE FIRST REAL CLUE.

AFTER riding across the bridge with the hackman, the detective became satisfied that he was innocent of any intentional collusion, and, dismounting from the box, allowed him to go his way, while Thad took a bridge car and returned to Mrs. Wright's boarding-house.

Late as it was, Dawson was still up waiting for him to return.

"I thought you would never get back," said he, when Thad put in an appearance. "When the landlady told me you had gone off with a woman I did not know what to think of it."

"Didn't she know who the lady was?" laughed the detective.

"Apparently not. At least she did not mention her name. She said that some young woman had come to see you and that your conversation was so confidential that you wouldn't allow her to remain in the room. What does it all mean, sir?"

Thad laughed more heartily than ever.

"Was the landlady indignant?" he asked.

"Indignant is no name for it. She was hopping mad. She said her house was not a place for gentlemen to receive ladies for secret interviews."

"The old idiot! I noticed that she was a little put out because I asked her to leave the room while I talked with Dixie—"

"Dixie?"

"Yes, the lady was no other than your former friend Dixie, and I am surprised that the landlady did not recognize her."

"What did she want?"

"She came upon the double mission of telling me that those villains had again threatened my life, and to tell me how they came in possession of the secret word with which the safe was locked on the night of the murder."

"Did she know that?"

"I do not see why she shouldn't, as you told her yourself."

"I told her?"

"Yes."

"Nonsense."

"That is what she says, at all events."

"When did she say that I told her the combination of the safe lock?"

"She says you told her on the very evening preceding the robbery. That you came home with Clarence Meredith and told her that you were going out to dinner, that she remonstrated with you for leaving her so much, and finally accused you not loving her, and that you then said, 'I don't see how you can say that, Dixie, when the safe of the bank is locked this very night with your precious name!'"

"By Jove! I remember it now. It was

while I was dressing for dinner. She came into my bedroom and began to chide me for neglecting her and in order to appease her, I did tell her that."

"And the assistant cashier was in the next room, was he?"

"Yes, and I presume heard it."

"Of course he did. That is the way they got into the safe. Clarence was in collusion with them."

"I can never believe that. He may have been influenced by Rochfort like all the rest, but he would never have been mixed up in it of his own accord."

"Possibly you are right. This fellow Rochfort seems to have had them all in his grasp. We will never unravel this tangle till we find out the secret of this terrible influence."

"Which we will never find out, I am afraid."

"Yes we will, and sooner than you imagine. In the first place, I want to search Clarence Meredith's effects and see if there is not some scrap of paper that will throw some light on the mystery. Where does he live?"

"In Brooklyn, and not very far from here. By the way, I have his address somewhere. He gave it to me the very night he was murdered."

Dawson arose and went to a closet and taking down the coat he had worn on the night of the dinner, searched through the pockets.

"Ah, here it is," he finally exclaimed. "I knew I had it somewhere. That is about the last thing the poor fellow ever wrote."

"I shall call there to-morrow."

"I don't think it will be worth while."

"Why?"

"His effects were taken possession of by his friends immediately after his death."

"That is unfortunate. Do you know where his people live?"

"Out in the country some place, but just where I do not know."

"However, I will call at the place where he was stopping. There might be something that would serve as a clue."

Accordingly Thad called the next morning at the former boarding-house of the murdered assistant cashier.

Upon inquiring of the landlady whether Clarence Meredith's effects had all been taken away, the landlady replied:

"Yes, everything worth while. There were a few old letters which had fallen out of his trunk or been dropped by him, and his friends did not take them. I suppose they didn't consider them worth taking."

"What became of the letters?"

"I saved them. I did not know but somebody would call for them some day, especially as he had been murdered and the bank robbed."

"Have you looked over the contents of the letters, madam?"

"No, sir. I did think of doing so, but I have never had time."

"Will you let me have them?"

"With pleasure."

She left the room and soon returned with a package of letters.

Thad at once set to work looking through them.

They were business letters for the most part, but there were one or two private ones.

Among these was a letter from Herbert Rochfort. It was dated the day preceding the night of the robbery and read as follows:

"DEAR MEREDITH:—

"The thing is set for to night, and I shall expect you to do your part. Procure the secret word at all hazards. You need do no more, but that much you must do, or you know what the consequences will be. As you are aware, she will refuse me nothing, and a refusal on your part will result in landing you in the State Prison. Half-past ten is the time set for the business, as everybody will be out of the way at that time, and there will be less danger than at a later hour. Be prompt.

"Yours,

"ROCHFORD."

This was important evidence.

It not only clinched the evidence against Rochfort, but it fixed the hour at which the robbery was probably committed.

That accounted for the night watchman

being out later than usual, and in company with the banker's valet.

Mrs. Myers, supposing her to be an accomplice—and Thad no longer had any doubt that she was—had arranged to have the valet call upon the young watchman and invite him to dinner.

This, she knew, would keep him out of the way until the robbery could be consummated.

With this additional evidence against Rochfort the detective was about ready to proceed against him.

He wanted to learn one thing more, however, before proceeding, and that was the secret of the influence he wielded over every one, especially the Myers family.

This could only be done by learning of the Sharper's early history, as Thad believed his influence must date back some years.

As he made his way homeward the detective met young Foy, the watchman of the bank.

The boy did not recognize him, of course, but the detective made himself known to him.

"Are you still at the bank?" was Thad's first question.

"Yes, sir," replied the boy. "I decided to stay."

"Have you been troubled with the ghost lately?"

"Only once since you were there, and that was last night. He says he will be there to night, though, and would like to talk to you."

"All right, I shall be there. It is just possible that he may be less non-committal this time."

"Yes, sir, I think he has something to tell about the murder and robbery."

"That is what I am anxious to hear about."

About half-past eleven, that being the time at which the apparition usually made its appearance, Thad, according to engagement with the watchman, arrived at the bank. Foy was waiting for him, and opened the door promptly for him.

"Has our ghost arrived yet?" asked the detective, smiling.

"Not so yet, sir," replied the boy.

"I hope he won't disappoint us."

"He isn't likely to, I guess."

"Were you frightened last night when he came?"

"Not much as I was that first time, although I was a little startled."

"Did you see him, or just hear him?"

"I just heard him."

"In the same place, I suppose."

"Exactly in the same spot."

"What did he say?"

"He asked if you were here, and when we told him that you were not he said that he would come to-night, and to try to have you here, as he has something to tell you."

At that moment there was the sound of chains rattling which appeared to emanate from the wall just above where Thad sat.

The detective, who was sitting with his back to the wall, turned, smiled, and said:

"Ah, there, friend Ghost!"

"Aha!" cried the voice. "I see you are here to night."

"Yes, I understood you wanted to talk to me, and I am here and at your service."

There was silence for a few moments, and then a repetition of the rattling of the chains.

"What I wish to say," began the voice in the wall, "is this: You have been working very hard for some time to discover certain facts concerning the murder and robbery, and have only partially succeeded. Perhaps I can help you out."

"It will be very kind of you, if you will," rejoined the detective laughing.

"As I told you before, I am the spirit of George Meredith, and I know all about that horrible affair."

"You are the person—excuse me—the goblin, I want."

"In the first place, I want to correct an error under which you are laboring. The man known as Clarence Meredith, and who is supposed to have been my brother, is nothing of the kind. His right name is Clarence Sothern, and he is the nephew of Herbert Rochfort. He is not guilty of either the robbery or murder, as you suppose."

"Who is, then?"

"It lies between Herbert Rochfort and myself. I unlocked the safe and took out the money, but I was forced to do it by Rochfort."

"Why did he kill you?"

"Why, to do him justice, he did it in self-defense."

"How was that?"

"After he had forced me to open the safe at the point of the pistol, and I had taken out the money and given it to him, he turned away with the sneering remark: 'Now, dog, you have done your dirty work, you may go, and thank your stars that I allowed you to save your neck so easily.' Stung to the soul, and with the full force of my wrongs upon me, I snatched the revolver out of his hand and attempted to kill him on the spot, but he was too quick for me, and, moreover, being my physical superior, he succeeded in wrenching the revolver away from me again. Still smarting under the injuries I had received at his hands and realizing the criminal he had made me that night, I was furious and made a spring for his throat, intending to choke the life out of him. But he again evaded me, and stepping back, shot me dead."

"And young Sothern had nothing to do with the crime?"

"Nothing directly. He was here when the crime was committed, but he took no active part in it."

"Did he receive none of the booty?"

"Yes, he received it all."

"All?"

"Yes, the whole three hundred thousand dollars."

"How was that?"

"That was to be his share for keeping quiet about certain other matters."

"What other matters?"

"A covenant between Rochfort and Mrs. Myers."

"What was the nature of that covenant?"

"I cannot tell you that, but you will learn the whole story by writing to or calling upon Charles Sothern, in Sansom street, San Francisco."

"Well, perhaps you can tell me something about the secret of the influence of Rochfort over Mrs. Myers?"

"I cannot, but this same party I speak of can and will, if you will write to or call upon him."

"Thanks. I shall take your advice in the matter. Now tell me, how came the scratch on the safe near the lock, which I have attributed to the stone in the banker's ring?"

"I do not know what you mean."

"There is a semicircular scratch around the knob of the safe door which has the appearance of having been made by a double-pointed stone in a ring worn on the middle finger of the right hand. How came it there?"

"I do not know."

"Then you are not infallible as a ghost."

The voice made no response, and Thad began to suspect, as he had on the first occasion of hearing the voice, that it was some human being concealed in the wall, but he did not refer to the matter.

"There is one more question I should like to ask you, Mr. Ghost," pursued the detective.

"What is that?"

"What are Sothern's and Mrs. Myers's relations?"

"That of mother and son."

CHAPTER XX.

A NEW WITNESS.

As soon as the alleged ghost had uttered the last sentence, that is, in regard to the relations between Mrs. Myers and young Meredith, it ceased speaking, and nothing could induce it to utter another word.

There were several other things that the detective would liked to have consulted it about, but it was no use. No amount of persuasion could prevail upon it to break its silence.

Finally Thad gave it up and left the bank. He at once returned to Brooklyn to report the result of his interview with the ghost to his young friend Dawson, whom he found sitting up waiting for him.

"What's the news?" demanded the young man as soon as Thad entered the room.

"Great news this time, my boy," replied

the detective. "If my informant is to be relied upon, we are at last upon the right track."

"Good! Tell me about it."

"Well, as I have surmised for some time, Rochfort the Sharper is at the bottom of the whole business. Mrs. Myers is the victim of some sort of a system of blackmail which Rochfort is using to extort money from her. Meredith, who is her son—"

"Her son?" interrupted the young man, jumping clear off his seat.

"Yes. His right name is Sothern, and he is Mrs. Myers's son, and herein, in my opinion, lies the secret of Rochfort's power over her. She has made a slip at some time during her life and this young chap is the result. Of course her husband knows nothing about this, and she would not have him know for all the money in Wall street. Maternal affection had induced her to bring him into her house, in spite of his questionable parentage, no doubt, but not daring to acknowledge him as her son, she has palmed him off on her husband as her nephew."

"Then all our suspicions about criminal relations existing between them were groundless?"

"Unquestionably. It will probably transpire that Mrs. Myers is nothing like as bad a woman as we have supposed. She is simply unfortunate enough to have made a slip at some time—probably in her early youth—and still more unfortunate in having such an unprincipled rascal as Rochfort to be in possession of the knowledge."

"But this young fellow did not turn up here until about five years ago."

"There is just the point. She has probably had him brought up by somebody, and, for aught we know, he had wandered off and she had lost sight of him, possibly thought he was dead, and then Rochfort ran across him, and knowing the secret of his birth, as well as the present prosperous condition of his mother, he decided to use the young man as a cat's-paw to extort money from her."

"And you say the alleged ghost told you all this?"

"Yes."

"Then, you can believe what you like of it, for, in my opinion, the so-called ghost is an impostor, and nobody but Meredith himself."

"I am inclined to think the same thing, but he gave me one piece of information which I propose to profit by."

"What is that?"

"He gave me the name and address of a man in San Francisco who, he says, knows all about Rochfort and can give me the whole history of the affairs which we are desirous of knowing. I have telegraphed to him, and shall probably have an answer in the morning."

"Provided any such man exists," interposed Dawson.

"Yes, provided any such person exists, of course. If there is, and he answers the questions I put to him, I shall at once make a trip to San Francisco and get all the facts."

"What is the use, when you have evidence enough already to convict Rochfort?"

"I certainly have enough evidence to convict him, but in doing so, without more evidence in another direction, I will also inculpate Mrs. Myers and Meredith or Sothern, rather, which I do not wish to do, if they are innocent. Another thing I desire to avoid is allowing Mr. Myers to know anything about it. It is my wish to spare him the shame and humiliation that a complete exposure would entail."

The young man's lip curled.

For the life of him he could not repress the animosity he felt against the banker on account of the treatment he had received at his hands.

"Why should we be so particular to spare him?" he sneered. "He was nowise particular about sparing me, when I was as innocent as he."

"Ah, but he did not know it, nor does he know it to this day. If he harbors an ill-feeling toward you, it is because he firmly believes you to be a thief and a murderer. You cannot blame him under the circumstances, my boy."

"Perhaps not," he said dryly.

Nevertheless, as soon as Thad had left the room he resolved upon a plan which, with-

out intending to interfere with the detective's arrangements; he felt would cool his own spleen and cause the banker to experience something of the bitterness he himself had felt for the past few weeks.

He sat down and wrote an anonymous letter in a disguised hand, to the banker.

In it he exposed the whole scheme of Rochford, the Sharper, as he understood it, exploited Rochford's character to the fullest extent and warned the banker against allowing his daughter to marry such a man, whom he characterized as a thief, blackmailer and murderer.

He then came to Meredith. After putting great stress upon the fellow's character, he ignored the information he had received about Meredith being Mrs. Myers's son, and stated what he had been supposed to be before the detective had made the latest discoveries—the lady's lover. He also told the banker about Meredith pawning his wife's diamonds, and wound up by stating as a positive fact that Rochford and Meredith had robbed the bank and killed the assistant cashier, and that Mrs. Myers was undoubtedly a party to it all.

"That ought to stir his bile," mused the young man, as he folded the letter and put it into an envelope. "Perhaps he will now know what shame and humiliation mean. Perhaps he will realize what I have felt for the past several weeks."

After directing the envelope, Dawson slipped quietly out of the house and dropped the letter into a post-box on the next corner and then crept back to his room, feeling about as comfortable as a man might who has just stabbed a foe in the back and run away.

Very little sleep came to him that night, and the more he thought over what he had done, the more he condemned himself for having committed a mean, cowardly act, and he would have given a great deal to have recalled that letter.

Early the following morning Thad received a reply to his telegram to San Francisco. It was signed Charles Sothern, and said that the transmitter was well acquainted with all the facts connected with the lives of Herbert Rochford and Frances Sothern, the mother of Clarence Sothern, and closed by saying that he would save the detective a trip across the continent by writing the facts in full.

The next few days were days of extreme suspense to both the detective and Dawson. The later's uneasiness was increased by an anxiety to know the result of the letter to the banker.

Finally, on the fourth day after the receipt of the telegram, the letter arrived.

It was a bulky affair, the envelope half covered with stamps.

"By Jove!" mused the detective, "we must have a full biography of the whole family here!"

He was about to tear the envelope open, when the bell rung and the girl announced a visitor for Mr. Goodale.

The girl did not state the sex of the visitor, and Thad was a little surprised to find that it was a woman, and still more surprised when she removed her veil, to find that it was Dixie.

"Well, my little humbug," he began, in a kindly bantering tone, "what have we to tell this time, and how much of it is true?"

She looked at him with a hurt expression, and finally burst out laughing.

"Why, have I ever told you anything that wasn't true?" she asked.

"Well, I do not know that you have, exactly, but you played me a pretty trick the other evening."

She screamed with laughter.

"That was when you tried to follow me?" she cried.

"Yes."

"It served you just right. I told you that you were not to know where we were stopping and that was to pay you for your curiosity. If a woman were to be so inquisitive, you would be just tickled to death to see her fooled that way."

"I suppose I would, little chatter-box," smiled the good-natured detective, "but what have you got to tell me this time?"

"Lots. In the first place, the old gent has discovered that Meredith is not the old lady's nephew, but only her lover."

"What!" exclaimed the detective in astonishment.

"Fact. Somebody's written to him and told him all about it, and he's about crazy. The person also told him that Rochford was a thief, a blackleg and a murderer and all that, so the old gent has forbidden him the house and forbidden Estelle to see him again."

"How does she take that?"

"She is just delighted. She was just secretly hoping that something of that kind would turn up to prevent the marriage."

"That part of it is good, anyway; but who is this letter from? Do you know?"

"No, nor he don't either. It didn't have any name signed to it. It was—what do you call it?"

"Anonymous?"

"Yes."

"How did you get hold of this information? Did they talk about it openly?"

"Not a word. Mr. Myers hasn't even spoken to his wife about it. But he told Estelle this morning that she must never see Rochford again and told the servants that when he called, to say that there was nobody at home for him."

"But you have not told me how you got possession of the information."

"Oh, yes. Well, you know that, woman-like, I am very curious."

"Just what I said," laughed the detective.

"Well, I often peep through the keyhole when I know the old man's got anything he don't want anybody to know. The other morning when his mail came I saw that he was terribly worried over one letter and I was determined to see what it was, so I noticed where he put it, and as soon as he went out I went in and read it. He had only gone out for a moment, and I had only just got through with the letter and put it away when I heard him coming."

"Did he see you?"

"No, I was too cute for that. Well, as soon as he got into the room again he locked the door, and then he took the letter out and read it over again. Then he went to a drawer and took out a revolver, and I was sure that he intended to take his own life, but as soon as he examined the pistol, I heard him say to himself, 'That will do the work. One or both of them must die.'"

"Whom did he mean?"

"His wife and Meredith."

"Well?"

"That very day Mrs. Myers received a letter from Meredith postmarked Stamford, Conn., and an hour afterward she told Estelle that she was compelled to go out on business and said that she might not be back that night. Estelle thought she was still in the city, but I knew she had gone to Stamford to meet her lover."

"But he is not her lover, Dixie."

"No?"

"No."

"I know he claims to be her nephew, but—"

"He is neither lover or nephew," interrupted the detective.

"What is he, then?" she asked in great surprise.

"Her son."

"Her son?"

"Yes."

Dixie was silent and thoughtful for a few moments, and then she shook her wicked little head doubtfully, and said:

"I don't believe it."

"Why?"

"They don't act like it."

"How do you know?"

"I have seen them through the keyhole."

"How did they act?"

"Why—not like mother and son."

"You are mistaken, Dixie," protested the detective. "They are mother and son."

"Then their actions are mighty deceptive, sir," she insisted. "But I must tell you. She received another letter this morning from Meredith—"

"How do you know that it was from him?"

"Don't you suppose I know his writing?"

"Perhaps. Well?"

"As soon as she received it, she told Estelle again that she must go out, and a little while afterward she did go, but I knew

something that the old lady or Estelle did not know."

"What was that?"

"The old gent opened and read that letter before the old lady saw it."

"Peeping again, eh?"

"Yes."

"Well, what did he do after reading the letter?"

"He resealed it and put it where his wife would get it, and then he went to the desk and took out the pistol and examined it again. And then he went up-stairs to dress, and I went into the room and drew the balls out of all the cartridges in the pistol."

"What did you do that for?"

"I knew that he intended following his wife, and that when he saw her in company with Meredith he would shoot them both, and I thought I would prevent that."

"You did well, my girl. But do you know whereabouts in Stamford they have gone?"

"They did not go to Stamford at all. The postmark was only a sham. They have gone to the country seat of Meredith over in Astoria."

"I see. Does Mr. Myers know where they have gone?"

"I don't know about that."

"Well, what else have you got to tell me?"

"Nothing, only I would like to have you go to where they are and prevent a tragedy if possible."

"There can't be much of a tragedy, as you have drawn the balls out of the pistol."

"That will not prevent Meredith from shooting the old man."

"That is true, and I will go at once."

As soon as Dixie took her leave the detective went up to Dawson's room, and together they went over the letter Thad had received from San Francisco, which, as he expected it would be, was a complete history of Rochford and the early life of the banker's wife.

CHAPTER XXI.

A DARK HISTORY.

THE story, as the detective gleaned it from the letter, was about as follows:

Some twenty-five years before a young girl was brought out to Oakland, which is just across the bay from San Francisco, and put to school at one of the famous female seminaries. She came with her aunt, an old maid, in whose hands the girl had been left on the death of her parents.

They had lived in one of the suburbs of Boston, and the old maid, who was a trifle cranky, got into her head that the girl was getting a little wild, just because she liked society better than she did her catechism or Sunday-school. So she thought she would take her out where she wasn't known and she would be compelled to attend to her lessons.

Frances Sothern at that period was only sixteen years old and remarkably beautiful.

Her father had been a wealthy man and left his daughter, the only heir, a large fortune in her own right.

For awhile after reaching the Pacific Slope the girl was contented and gave her whole mind to her studies, but this did not last long.

Being used to gay society at home, the staid, old-fashioned people with whom her aunt had put her to board, grew wearisome to her.

They had nothing in common with her, and according to the instructions they had received from the aunt, would allow her to go nowhere except to church, and then in company with some of the older members of the family.

Finally the confinement became unbearable. The girl was pining away, and she begged for and obtained permission to take an occasional stroll along the beach to watch the wonderful sunset off toward the Golden Gate.

Finding that there was no harm growing out of the practice, the simple old folk soon came to allow her to extend the time from half an hour to an hour, and from an hour to two hours, and finally she came to spend pretty much all her time after leaving school till bedtime, and it was often far into the night before she would return.

The old folk would often reprimand her

for remaining out so late, but she would laugh at their fears, and say that the sea-breeze and the moon on the water had been so enchanting that she could not leave it any sooner.

They did not know, simple old people, that all this time Frances had another and a graver object in remaining out so late.

It was during her second stroll along the beach that she met a remarkably handsome young man.

Of course they did not speak, but each looked at the other as young people will do, and passed on. But strange to say, the very next time she went to stroll she met him again in the same spot.

This time the young man made some excuse to speak, and after that their acquaintance gradually grew.

It was a case of love at first sight on both sides, and it was not long before each had told the other of the fact.

Well, the result of it all was, that one night Frances, so far from returning home early, did not return at all.

It was months before they heard anything about her, and then she came back, sick and broken-hearted.

She had eloped with the handsome young man, whose name was Eldridge Rochfort, and, as she supposed, was married to him. They had gone to the Palace Hotel to live, and for a time they were very happy.

Then one day he told her that he must go East on business and would be gone a couple of weeks.

At the end of a week she received a letter from him from Boston.

He told her plainly that the marriage had been a sham one and that he had deceived her all round, for, instead of being rich, as he had represented himself, he was only a poor man, and that his only means of livelihood was that of a gambler. That he had "gone broke" a few days before his departure for the East, and, realizing that he could no longer support her in a style which he considered she deserved, he had considered it best to leave her and let her return to her people.

She did return, sick and disconsolate, and the good people were good enough to take her back and keep her till after her baby was born.

In the mean time her aunt in Boston had died and left her in addition to her own fortune, that of the old aunt, which was considerable.

Her first adventure had the effect of sobering the young woman, and putting her baby away with some well-to-do people to bring up, she devoted herself to her studies for the next several years, and in the course of time became an accomplished as well as a very beautiful woman. She bought a handsome property in San Francisco, became a leader in society, and was extremely popular with the best people of the city.

Finally a young man by the name of Alexander Myers came to the Pacific capital, and in the course of time met Miss Sothern who was then the reigning belle.

He had been speculating in stocks and one thing and another and had accumulated quite a fortune, and as the young couple liked each other, they finally married.

After a few years' residence in San Francisco, they had returned to the East, where Mr. Myers had gone into the banking business and made a great amount of money.

Thus matters went on for years and the Myerses lived happily and raised a large family.

Mr. Myers, knowing nothing of his wife's early adventure, had been happy in the faith in her purity, and she never abused his confidence.

But at length a day of evil came.

Mrs. Myers had a cousin living in San Francisco (Charles Sothern the present writer,) who thought a great deal of her and kept track of her movements.

He and she corresponded regularly and kept each other posted on their mutual affairs.

One day a man came to this Charles Sothern and introduced himself as Herbert Rochfort. He claimed to be a brother of the man who had deceived Frances. He stated that Eldridge was dead, and that he, the uncle, was desirous of making amends for his brother's wrong-doing by finding and

bringing up the boy. He claimed to be rich, and said that as he had no children of his own, he was anxious to leave all his property to Frances's boy.

Mr. Sothern, realizing the kindness of this act, used all his efforts to discover the whereabouts of the boy, who, by the way, must be a man by this time; but, without avail.

He had run away from the people with whom he had been left and nothing had been heard of him afterward.

Rochfort went away and Sothern heard no more from him; but he heard a good deal of him soon after.

He learned that he was a gambler and a thief, and that, so far from being the wealthy man he had represented himself, he never had an honest dollar in his life, although he sometimes possessed large sums which he had come by in a questionable manner.

Fearful that he might come across the boy and make a blackleg of him, Mr. Sothern had instituted a fresh search for him, and in the course of time, got a trace of him.

It appears that the boy had always been wild, almost from infancy, that the people with whom he was living could do nothing with him, and at the age of fifteen he had run away and gone East.

After a considerable amount of trouble and the outlay of a good deal of money, he had finally traced the boy to New York.

He had always led a reckless life, and among his other accomplishments, had become an expert pickpocket.

Finally Mr. Sothern found him, and as the boy promised to reform, he had taken him with him.

But, he had not been under his benefactor's roof long before the latter regretted that he had not left him to his fate.

He was eternally getting into trouble and making Mr. Sothern more trouble and expense than a dozen boys should have done.

Clarence had at least one noble trait.

He was brave as a lion and would not take an insult from any man.

One night he was playing billiards with one of his reckless set.

The resort was one of the worst in San Francisco, but he delighted to frequent such places.

A few of the men present were his friends, but more of them were his bitter enemies. He had beaten nearly all of them at poker and whipped a few more with his fists.

This was sufficient to create a crowd of enemies among the class that frequented the place.

Some of them had taken the trouble to look up the young man's record and pedigree and had succeeded in discovering that his father and mother had never been married.

That was enough. Perhaps half the frequenters of the place were no better off, but they did not claim to be anything, while he posed as something of a dude, as they put it.

On the night in question one of the bullies whom he had worsted in a game of poker came up to him and made some insolent remark, which raised his ire at once.

Without a word Clarence drew off with his cue and laid the fellow out.

Fortunately he was not very badly hurt and soon jumped to his feet and as he did so, gave an account in a few brief sentences of Clarence's parentage.

He had hardly finished the harangue, however, before Clarence came at him again with the billiard-cue, but before he could strike his tormentor the cue was wrenched from his hand and a dozen blows rained upon him from as many different sources.

"Kill the dude!" yelled the infuriated mob.

"Slash him!"

"Split his head open!"

Clarence fought like a tiger, and succeeded in keeping them at bay for some moments.

But they pressed closer and closer upon him and seemed determined to kill him.

His blood was up and he saw that his antagonists meant to show no quarter, so he determined to show none.

Just then the big bully who had first insulted came forward, his face covered with blood from the cut Clarence had given him with the cue, and made a vigorous lunge at the young man.

But Clarence was too quick for him.

Springing nimbly back, he drew his knife.

The next instant the knife was buried to the hilt in the ruffian's breast.

The fellow reeled and fell to the floor and then there was a wild yell from the crowd.

"Kill the dude!"

"Get a rope and lynch him!"

"Shoot the upstart dog!"

Meanwhile the young man had jumped upon the billiard table, and with a cue which he held by the small end, he was playing sad havoc with whoever came near enough.

But the crowd was constantly increasing and they thirsted for his blood.

He knew it would only be a matter of time when he would have to succumb to overwhelming numbers, and he looked for a chance of escape.

It would be folly to attempt it through the hall.

Every avenue of escape in that direction was packed with the surging, howling mob.

He glanced at the window, which was but a few feet from the table on one side.

He did not know how far it was from the ground, but he thought he might as well die that way as to be torn to pieces or hanged by the mob.

Just then there was a different cry from the mob.

The police were coming.

Now he must make his escape.

With a mighty bound he dashed at the window and went through sash and all.

The ground was fortunately only a few feet below, so that he was not badly hurt in that way, although he was pretty badly cut with the broken glass.

Once on the ground he lost no time.

He was a swift runner, and was soon many yards ahead of his pursuers.

He had about ten blocks to reach his cousin's house, and he made the distance easily, and his escape would have been assured, at least for the present, had it not been for an accident.

As he bounded up the steps to the gate he stumbled and fell back.

This gave his pursuers an opportunity to catch up and by the time he was fairly upon his feet again they were upon him.

He still held the bloody knife with which he had committed one murder, and as his pursuers began to press upon him he wielded the knife with the fury of a Trojan.

Finally one, more bold than the rest, dashed upon him and attempted to hit him in the face with a club.

A quick and dexterous blow from the deadly knife laid the fellow bleeding at Clarence's feet.

This intimidated the mob for the instant, and caused them to hesitate.

This gave the young man an opportunity to get the gate open and enter, after which he barred it on the inside.

A moment later he fell upon his knees before his cousin and benefactor.

"Save me!" he cried frantically. "They are after me and will kill me if they catch me!"

"What is the matter?" demanded Mr. Sothern, horrified and almost frightened to see the young man covered with blood.

"I have just killed two men!" cried Clarence. "Oh, save me!"

"Killed two men!" gasped the cousin.

"Yes."

"When? Where?"

"At the Eldorado, just now. Oh, save me! They will be here in a minute!"

Mr. Sothern was a cool-headed man, and after thinking a moment, said:

"There is but one thing to be done. You must fly."

"I know it, but how?"

"Slip up-stairs and wash yourself and change your clothing, and I will keep the mob back in the mean time. When you are ready to start, slip out the back way and be off. Here is my purse. You will find enough in there to carry you to New York. When you get there write for more."

Clarence took the purse without a word and slipped away.

Mr. Sothern went out and talked to the mob. He told them that the young man was badly hurt and was now in a state of insensibility, and that as soon as he came to himself, the officers of the law were at liberty to come and take him.

Meanwhile Clarence had washed and dressed himself and made his escape.

This was easy, as the house was one of those common in the hilly part of the Pacific Metropolis that are built against a hill, so that while you climb a flight of stairs in front you can walk out upon the ground at the rear.

Here the narrative closed with a note to the effect that more facts would be sent on later.

CHAPTER XXII.

VENGEANCE.

"WELL, what do you think of it?" queried Dawson when they had finished the narrative.

"I think that, with the exception of a few details which are of no particular interest, there is nothing new in it for us. We knew that Mrs. Myers had made a slip of some kind, and it made no difference to us what the nature of it was, and we knew, theoretically at least, that the knowledge of this slip or misfortune gave Rochfort the power over the banker's wife. The only thing of importance we have learned is the confirmation that Meredith is not Meredith, but Sothern, and that he is the illegitimate son of Mrs. Myers. All the importance there is about these facts that I can see is, that they confirm the statement of the so-called Ghost Witness."

"Which proves that whoever he is he knew what he was talking about," observed Dawson.

"And yet we are not compelled to believe that Meredith or Sothern is the banker's wife's son."

"Why?"

"So far we only have the statement of the ghost for that, and, as you suggested, the other night, this may be Meredith himself, and he might have an object in making us believe that he was the old lady's son, as I have no doubt she herself would have. But, my boy, I must go."

"Where now?"

"Dixie was here just now—I forgot to tell you—and she says that Mr. Myers has learned all about the alleged relations between his wife and Meredith, that Meredith and his wife are at the young man's country place at Astoria, and that the old man has gone off post-haste to meet them, with blood in his eye."

"The banker has found out—"

"Yes. Some ass has written him telling him all about it. Some fellow who had not the courage to sign his name to the letter. But what is the matter, Dawson?"

The young man had turned deadly pale, and was trembling as though about to reel to the floor.

"Nothing—a queer sensation came over me, that is all. It will soon pass. What about the anonymous letter?"

"I say that some idiot, who was evidently fonder of scandal than of people's feelings or character, has written the old man a letter in which he—the writer—gives a sketch of Meredith's and Rochfort's life and character and the supposed relations between the banker's wife and the young scapegrace. The old man is about crazy over revelation, and had sworn to take both their lives as soon as he sees them, and has also forbidden Estelle to see Rochfort again."

"Eh?"

Dawson was on his feet instantly, and his face was aglow with delight.

"Is that true?" he cried, rapturously

"So Dixie says."

"Then I am glad—glad that—call me ass and idiot if you like, but I am glad that—"

"You don't mean to tell me that you wrote that idiotic letter?" interrupted the detective, growing scarlet with indignation.

It was his turn to spring to his feet now.

"It may have been idiotic, as you say, sir, and I may have done it under the influence of a foolish impulse, but I did it, and there is no need of denying it now. And, inasmuch as it has resulted in driving that heartless wretch from the presence of Estelle, I am not sorry I did it."

Thad was too angry to speak for a moment or two.

"You never stopped to think that in so

doing you were probably upsetting all my plans, I presume?" he finally said. "That in so doing you did the very thing that I have tried hardest to avoid, to keep this matter from the banker until we discovered whether his wife was really guilty of a great crime or merely the unfortunate victim of these plotting villains?"

Dawson was overcome with a sense of shame and embarrassment.

He never realized till now the enormity of his error, and it came upon him like a thunder-clap.

"Forgive me, sir," he finally faltered. "I see now that I made an idiot of myself, and shall never forgive myself if my folly interferes with your plans. What shall I say to convince you that I am truly sorry for what I did?"

The young man's penitence was too sincere for the detective to avoid being deeply touched. Besides, the work was done now, and could not be undone.

"Well, here is my hand, my boy," he finally said. "I forgot the strain you were under, and which makes you to a certain extent excusable for any amount of folly. But I must go. I may be too late already. Good-by."

As Thad descended the stairs the door bell rung and when he reached the hall below the girl handed him another letter. It, like the one he had received that morning, was post-marked San Francisco, and it was directed in the same handwriting.

"Another installment," he mused, as he put the letter into his pocket.

He was compelled to walk almost to the bridge before he found a cab, and when he did he was not long in making a bargain with the driver for a ride to Astoria in the shortest time possible to horseflesh.

Nevertheless, it was late in the afternoon before he drove up to the house where he and Dawson had had the adventure with the ladder a few nights before.

As the cab approached the gate the detective noticed that another carriage had just stopped before it, and as he watched, a portly gentleman got out and entered the gate.

It was Mr. Myers, the banker.

"There is going to be music in the air now!" mused Thad. "The old gentleman has blood in his eye sure enough."

Allowing time for the banker to get inside, the detective alighted and went in, but while he was waiting he had taken the opportunity to tear open the letter from San Francisco and glanced hastily over its contents.

"By Jove! Dawson was right in his conjecture after all!" was his only comment as he returned the letter to his pocket.

Instead of going to the front door, the detective passed around to the side of the house. Here he found the shutters of one of the windows of the parlor only partially closed, so that by standing very close to it, he had a good view of the interior of the room.

The sound of voices inside caused him to stop and look in in the first place, and he saw that Mrs. Myers was there, sitting in an easy chair, with a smile of satisfaction upon her face.

Meredith was standing in the middle of the room, and they appeared to be engaged in earnest conversation.

But what puzzled the detective was, what had become of the banker?

He was nowhere to be seen, and from the satisfied smile on the faces of the two people in the room, he judged that they did not suspect his presence in the vicinity.

As Thad looked, Meredith advanced toward his mother and fell upon his knees at her feet.

"Yes, dear mother," he began, "I know that I have been a source of a great deal of sorrow and trouble to you, but if you will grant just this one request, I will reform, and do anything you wish. I will—"

But he got no further.

At that instant the door burst open and the banker stood before them.

He held a revolver in his hand, and was deadly pale.

It was evident that he was making superhuman efforts to remain calm, like a judge whose duty it is to justly punish crime.

"Aha!" he hissed, with a sardonic laugh.

"You are a little surprised to see me, are

you? You thought that my stupidity would last forever, and that you were safe to go on as long as you pleased, and the old fool would never suspect you? But you see you were mistaken. You were not dealing with such an old imbecile as you thought I was."

Mrs. Myers had sprung to her feet, and Meredith stepped in front of her to shield her from the infuriated man's bullets, should he conclude to fire.

"I assure you, uncle—" he began.

"Stop!" cried the banker with an impatient gesture. "I will hear no more of your lies. Let us have an end to this acting. I am no longer a dupe."

"I swear, sir—"

"Spare yourself the trouble of denying anything. I know all. I know who pawned my wife's diamonds. I know who committed the robbery, for which an innocent man was arrested and imprisoned."

Mrs. Myers, white with terror, fell upon her knees.

She saw that all was lost, and, wringing her hands in despair, she tearfully moaned:

"Pardon, Alex! For God's sake, forgive me!"

"Yes, it is a good time to ask my pardon, when you are fairly caught, and you think you can deceive me no longer! Had I not discovered you, how long do you think it would have been before you would have asked my forgiveness? On your death-bed, possibly. Well, your death-bed is not far off, and therefore I say it is a good time to ask my pardon."

Thad watched the expression of Meredith's face, and he appeared to be the coolest one of the three. His half-curved lip seemed to say that if the banker knew a few things, at least he did not know all.

He appeared to be determined to convince him of the mistake under which he was laboring, and said:

"Uncle, I hope you will listen—"

"Silence, sir!" cried the infuriated banker. "I will hear none of your falsehoods!"

He was silent for a few moments, and nothing could be heard but his wife's sobs.

"I came here," he finally resumed, "with the intention of killing you both. But I find that I cannot kill a woman, and I will not kill an unarmed man."

He cast his eyes about the room, and noticed a revolver lying on the mantel.

"Take that pistol," said he, pointing at the weapon, "and defend yourself, sir."

"Never!" returned Meredith coolly.

"Defend yourself, I say! or by—"

The banker had pushed the cold barrel of his revolver into the young man's face, and feeling the cold metal appeared to rouse him to a sense of his situation. Seizing his own pistol, he stepped to the opposite end of the room and prepared to fire.

But before either had time to draw a trigger, the woman sprung in front of the young man and threw her arms about his neck.

"Now fire!" she cried. "If he must die, I will die with him!"

This burst of maternal love, which the banker mistook for sinful passion, so enraged the banker that his patience and forbearance forsook him, and taking deliberate aim, he fired.

Neither the woman nor the young man moved, and the banker fired a second and a third time, and still they did not move.

He cocked the revolver for a fourth shot, but at that moment Thad rushed into the room and snatched the revolver away from him.

He knew that the parties were in no danger, as this was the pistol from which Dixie had extracted the balls, and yet he was apprehensive lest she might have overlooked one.

Making a hasty examination of the woman, he exclaimed:

"Thank Heaven! no harm is done so far."

"How dare you interfere?" shouted the banker, now more furious than ever.

"It is every man's duty to interfere where murder is about to be committed," replied the detective coolly.

"But you do not know the circumstances. You do not know what disgrace, what degradation I have suffered at the hands of this man and woman!"

"Oh, yes, I do. I know all about it," replied Thad.

"But you do not know that my wife

here confesses that she is guilty," persisted the banker.

"So she is, but not of the crime you imagine. Do you know who that man is whom you have just attempted to kill?"

"Her lover!"

"No; her son!"

The words seemed to paralyze the banker, and to frighten Meredith more than the banker's revolver. But he mustered courage to say:

"It is the truth, sir. I am her son."

Mr. Myers looked wildly from one to the other, and finally exclaimed:

"It is false. You are all conspiring to deceive me."

"You shall have the proofs," interposed the detective. "But first listen."

The banker was silent now, as, indeed, were the others, and all waited breathlessly to hear what the stranger was about to say.

"Mrs. Myers is innocent of any intentional wrong-doing in this connection," continued the detective. "She firmly believes this to be her son. She believes him to be the son of Eldridge Sothern, who deceived her more than twenty-four years ago, but he is nothing of the kind. The truth is—"

"What?" gasped the banker.

"That, in order to swindle her, he has perpetrated a gross imposture."

During the last few minutes Meredith had been quietly creeping toward the door, hoping to escape while no one was looking.

But Thad was watching him out of one corner of his eye, as was his wont under such circumstances.

He stepped between him and the door and stopped him as he was about leaving the room.

"Not so fast, young man," he said, as he turned the key in the lock and then withdrew it and put it into his pocket. "I have use for you yet. When you go out of here, it will be as my guest."

Meredith looked sharply at him for a moment, and then sneered:

"Great Heaven! it is the detective!"

"So it is," replied Thad. "And if you want further proof of it, looked at this."

And he shoved up his sleeve, exhibiting the cut, still not half healed, which Meredith had given him on that memorable night.

"There is a souvenir by which I can remember you, my fine bird!"

With that he grasped the young man's wrists, and before he was aware of it, had the handcuffs snapped on him.

"Now I will resume my story," continued the detective, turning to the banker and his wife. "I have traced the career of the son of Mrs. Myers from the time he was an infant, and have just this afternoon discovered that he died some four years ago. Herbert Rochfort, the brother of the man who deceived Frances Sothern when she was a young and innocent girl, has also taken some pains to trace up the boy, and, like myself, discovered that he was dead. His object in finding him was to use him as a tool to extort money from the boy's mother, and finding him dead made no difference to the scoundrelly Rochfort. He easily procured the assistance of this unprincipled young adventurer as an accomplice, and, bringing him before her in an unexpected moment, made her believe that he was her son. From that moment the two rascals have been extorting blackmail from the lady, who was weak enough to yield to their cupidity in order to purchase their silence on the one hand and through her maternal love on the other. So you see, sir," he continued, addressing himself to the banker, "that your wife is as innocent now as the day you married her!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE SECRET OUT.

As soon as the banker was convinced that his wife had really been the victim of an infamous blackmailing scheme, at the hands of two unprincipled scoundrels, his anger toward her melted and his old-time affection resumed sway.

Notwithstanding the one little blot on her character, he could not forget the twenty years of happiness he had spent with her, and of the help and encouragement she had lent in his darkest hours.

He was not only ready to forgive, but

really felt as though he had been the offender.

Silently he folded her in his arms, and for a moment or two nothing but their mingled sobs could be heard, but they were sobs of joy rather than sorrow now.

And thus the detective left them, as he marched away with his prisoner.

Meredith (we shall continue to call him that) remained silent, but remarkably cool, until they were in the cab, when he suddenly turned upon Thad with a bland smile, and exclaimed:

"I say, you must be the devil of a fellow!"

"Why so?" asked the detective, smiling.

"How the deuce did you learn all these particulars?"

"Oh, that is a part of my trade. If I were not able to gather details, there would be no success for me."

"Well, it beats all how closely you came to the facts, but you haven't got them all yet."

"I presume not."

"I can give you a few, if you would like to have them."

"Very well," replied Thad, dryly, for he imagined the fellow was going to attempt to make out a good-looking case for himself.

"As you stated, when Rochfort found that the real Clarence Sothern was dead, he looked about for some one to take his place. I was in St. Louis at the time, and one night as I was sitting in a saloon wondering what I could do to raise the wind—I had been gambling a little and went broke—when a tall man came in and sat down at another table. He appeared to be absorbed in thought or worried about something, frisked about, took up the paper, glanced it over nervously and tossed it down."

"His actions were so strange that I got to watching him. All this time he did not appear to have noticed me, but finally he turned his wild, black eyes in my direction, and it startled me. Well, he gazed straight at me for more than a minute, and finally took a photograph from his pocket and appeared to be comparing the picture with my face."

"At length he arose, moved quickly and nervously toward me and sat down on the opposite side of the table from me. 'Pardon me,' he said. 'I was just going to take a drink, and would like to have you join me.'"

"A thousand thoughts and suspicions flashed through my head in an instant. I thought of confidence-men, of detectives, and everything else. But as each successive image came, I had something to down it. A confidence-man could do me no harm, as I hadn't a dollar in my pocket; I had no fear of a detective, inasmuch as I had been guilty of no crime, and so on. Well, the result was that I accepted his invitation to drink and we had several, all at his expense, for, as I said, I hadn't a dollar. We talked on various topics, he asked me a good deal about myself, where I was from, where I was going, and what I was doing, and somehow I got the impression that he was a rich speculator of some kind."

"Suddenly he pulled out the photograph again and handed it to me with the inquiry: 'Did you ever see any one that looks like that?' I was astounded. The picture was the very image of myself! 'Why, it's a picture of myself!' I exclaimed. He smiled blandly. 'Not exactly,' he replied, 'but some one that looks a good deal like you. Now, my boy,' he went on, speaking rapidly. 'I have a proposition for you.' 'What is it?' I asked, for I was ready to go into anything just then."

"He then opened up the scheme we have just failed in. We were to come to New York and hunt up Mrs. Myers and I was to be palmed off on her as her son, knowing that she would be willing to sacrifice any amount of money rather than have the world know about her little romance of twenty-four years ago. As we expected, she fell into the trap easily, and since that time we have worked her for a large sum of money."

"It did not take us long to use the few thousand she possessed in her own right, and then she gave me her diamonds to pawn. That lasted for a few months; but, gambling and high living soon exhausted that and we were compelled to look about for something else."

"Rochfort, who always got the lion's share, had three hundred thousand in Myers's bank, and we decided to rob the bank of the same amount. You know all about how he went to Dawson and had him bring the amount of his deposit out of the vault and place it in the safe?"

"Yes," replied Thad, "I know all about that."

"Well, some days before this we had hatched the plan for a big haul. The sum taken from the bank was a mere trifle to what we expected to get. That transaction was merely for the purpose of getting rid of Dawson, who was betrothed to Estelle Myers. About a year before the robbery we conceived the plan that Rochfort should marry Estelle, who has something like half a million in her own right, besides what she might expect from her father on her marriage, and we were to divide the boodle. All this time I had passed as the old lady's nephew to prevent any suspicion on the part of her husband."

"One day Rochfort went to her and made a formal proposition for the hand of her daughter. She was shocked and horrified. She knew the character of the man with whom she was dealing, and would rather have seen her daughter in her grave than to have allowed her to marry such a reptile. He made all kinds of threats, but it was of no use, he could not move her, and thus they parted."

"When we met after the interview, I asked him the result. He shrugged his shoulders and replied: 'She kicks at present, but she will soon come round all right.' He was right. Inside of twenty-four hours he had a letter from her accepting his proposition."

"What had caused her to change her mind so suddenly?" asked the detective.

"Why, while the conversation between the lady and Rochfort was going on in the drawing-room, Estelle was sitting in a small alcove curtained off from the drawing-room, and heard the whole story of her mother's shame. As soon as the Sharper had taken his departure, she came out and proposed that she should break with Dawson and marry Rochfort, for the sake of saving her mother. Her mother would not hear to it for a good while, but when Estelle showed her the disgrace that would fall upon all the family following an expose, she finally yielded."

"Matters ran along for a year, and the lady furnished us with all the money she could rake and scrape, and finally we conceived the idea of robbing the bank for the double purpose of securing more money and getting rid of Dawson, whom we could see Estelle still loved, notwithstanding she had discarded him."

"Rochfort went to Mrs. Myers and laid the plot before her. She was horrified and frightened, but such was his malign power over her that she finally yielded and agreed to secure the key to the cash room which she knew her husband always kept in his secretary when he went out. This she did by stealing the key to his secretary from his pocket while he was asleep and making an impression of it in wax, from which a duplicate key was made."

"The next thing was to get the secret word with which the safe was locked. Nobody possessed that except the banker and the cashier. At length we hit upon a plan. We would get Dawson drunk and induce him to divulge the secret. Still, there being a chance of failure in that direction, we decided to take in another party."

"And that party was the assistant cashier," interposed the detective.

"Just so. He was indignant when we first broached the subject to him, but we were fortunate enough to know something about his antecedents, and knew that he had once made a slip himself. So he gladly purchased our silence. He, according to agreement, went to supper with Dawson, but, before going, contrived to have himself invited to the cashier's house. I had already prepared his woman, Dixie, by telling her that Dawson was neglecting her, and advised her to chide him at the first opportunity. That night was her first opportunity, and the result was what he hoped it would be. Dawson mentioned the fact that he had used her name as the secret word with which to lock the safe."

"This is all very straightforward so far, Mr. Meredith," interposed Thad. "But there is something else I wish to ask you."

"What is it?"

"There was a scratch on the door of the safe the morning after the robbery, which appeared to have been made by the setting of a ring worn on the middle finger of the right hand of the person who opened the safe."

Meredith laughed.

"You mentioned that the other night when speaking to the ghost," he observed.

"What! Then you were the ghost?"

"Yes. I'll tell you about that presently. But first, let me tell you about the scratch on the door. After the safe had been robbed and Rochfort had had the dispute with Meredith which resulted in the former shooting the latter, it occurred to him to leave some mark by which the crime would be attributed to some one else. If the cashier should escape, then it must fall upon some one else. There was but one other man upon whom it could fall, and that was the president himself. Rochfort remembered that the banker wore a double-pointed diamond on the middle finger of his right hand, and the assistant cashier wore one very similar to it, so he took the ring off the dead man's hand and putting it on his own, scratched the safe door with it in the manner you saw. For further proof, when you arrest Rochfort search his effects and you will find Meredith's ring in his possession."

"That is satisfactory. Now, about the ghost."

"Yes, I will tell you about the ghost. As you doubtless learned from our conversation when you were playing the part of valet to Rochfort, I was dissatisfied with the amount of money I was receiving from the old lady. I was the tool and Rochfort was receiving the bulk of the money. So I determined to get even with him, even if it cost me my own head. While I was an employee of the bank I discovered a passage from the basement of the building next door to the bank, running up between the walls of the two buildings, and I determined that if he did not do the right thing, to get you into the bank and tell you something, under the guise of the alleged ghost, which would put you onto the scent of this arch villain. If you remember, I refused to give you much information on the first occasion."

"I remember."

"Well, I was not quite ready then, but the last time I gave you the tip that led to your discovery of the whole plot."

"Very good so far. But on the first occasion of my knowing anything about the so-called ghost, I saw an apparition in the main room of the bank."

"You imagined you did. The fact is, I had a picture of myself, made up as my alleged brother—the assistant-cashier, and we resembled each other somewhat—placed it in a magic lantern at a point where the reflection would pass through a hole in the wall and fall upon the opposite wall where you saw it. As soon as you got inside I turned it off as I knew you would trace the source by the stream of light, and did not dare to attempt it the second time."

"You, too, have been something of a victim of this villain's machinations," interposed the detective.

"Yes," rejoined the other, "but a willing victim, and am entitled to no consideration."

"On the contrary, I consider that you are entitled to a good deal of consideration, and you shall have it. The information you have furnished is worth something, and I shall use my influence to have your sentence made as light as possible. There is one thing I would like to ask of you."

"Anything I can do, sir."

"Where will I be apt to find that sharper Rochfort?"

"At his house. He suspects nothing so far, and he expects me to-night. My object in getting the banker's wife out to my country-house was to induce her to give us more money, and Rochfort will expect me to bring it to him. If you can trust me, we will drive to his house and I will go in and fetch him out on some pretext, and when we get him into the cab, I guess you can manage him."

Thad was thoughtful for a moment.

Could he trust this man? He finally made up his mind that he could and would.

"Very well," he said. "We will drive to the house; I will remove your handcuffs, and you can go in and tell him that you will have to go to the banker's house to obtain the money."

Accordingly, the driver was instructed to drive to the house in Fifty-seventh street. Thad removed the shackles, and the young man went into the dwelling.

Thad waited for some time, and was about coming to the conclusion that he had trusted the young scapegrace too far, and that the latter had given him the slip, when the front door finally opened and the young man came out. But to the detective's surprise and chagrin, he was alone.

When Meredith approached the side of the carriage, Burr saw that he was pale and agitated.

"What is up?" demanded Thad. "Where is the man?"

"It's no go," rejoined Meredith, sadly.

"How's that?"

"He is gone."

"Gone?" gasped Thad.

"Yes."

"Where?"

"Nobody seems to know. He left the house about an hour ago, they tell me, but none of them appear to know anything about where he went, or when he is likely to return."

Burr was dumfounded. Nor was he quite satisfied that the young man was telling the truth. And then in the midst of his perplexity there flashed a horrible suspicion through his mind.

What if this young rogue had merely used this artifice to secure the opportunity to warn Rochfort?

He was capable of such a trick, and what was to hinder him from doing it?

He had some difficulty in controlling his anger, therefore, when he addressed the young man again.

"Are you sure that what you tell me is the truth?" he cried.

"Sure?" responded Meredith in a hurt voice. "Of course I am sure. What motive could I have in telling you anything but the truth?"

"I do not know. But you have deceived me many times, and I am always suspicious of a man who once tells me an untruth."

"Nevertheless, I am telling you the truth this time, and if you doubt my word, it will not take you long to verify it."

"How?"

"By going in and inquiring for yourself."

This had the effect of increasing the detective's suspicions of the prisoner.

If he really was playing a trick upon him he would want no better opportunity of making his own escape than to have Thad leave him there, when he would jump into the carriage and have himself driven away in short order.

However, for the double purpose of disguising the fact of his fear and satisfying himself regarding what the young man had told him, Burr said:

"Very well, get in here and remain while I go in and investigate for myself."

Meredith unhesitatingly climbed into the carriage, when Thad instantly snapped the handcuffs on him and then alighting from carriage, warned the driver not to move a wheel under penalty of serious consequences, until his return.

The cabby promised solemnly not to move, and Burr ascended the stoop and rung the bell.

"Is Mr. Rochfort in?" he demanded of the attendant who came to the door.

"He is not, sir," was the reply.

"Where is he?"

"I don't know, sir."

"When will he be back?"

"I can't tell you, sir. He left the house over an hour ago and didn't tell anybody where he was going or when he'd be back."

"Very well," said Burr, starting to leave.

"Who shall I tell him called?" asked the servant, putting his head out after him.

The question was so unexpected that Thad was stumped for an immediate answer, but after a second's reflection, he replied:

"Say it was a messenger from Mrs. Myers."

"Anything important?" persisted the attendant.

"Yes, very. It is something that concerns your master deeply."

"Do you wish to leave a message, sir?"

"No. Though you might say that either I or the lady herself will call later."

"Very well, sir."

Thad was satisfied. If the menial had not suspected anything and the sharper could also be hoodwinked into believing the story, the course would be clear for the detective; for Rochfort would think that the matter related to the money affair and would be only too glad to await his or the lady's return.

Burr wore a more cheerful countenance when he returned to the carriage.

CHAPTER XXIV.

IN THE TOILS AT LAST.

MEREDITH eyed the detective narrowly as he re-entered the carriage, and was not slow to note the change in his demeanor, and guessing that he had been satisfied with his investigation, asked:

"Well, what did you find out?"

"I give in," replied Thad, laughing. "What you told me was correct, I am sorry to say."

"I knew you would find it so," smiled Meredith. "But what now?"

"The servant spoke as though his master might return some time during the evening, and my only plan, so far as I can see now, is to wait and call back later."

"But is there any probability of his returning?"

"Yes, I think there is."

"And if he does, will not the servants know enough to put him on his guard?"

"I took the precaution to guard against that, by telling the attendant at the door that I was a messenger from Mrs. Myers, and that either I or the lady herself would call back later. How was that for a stroke?"

"You couldn't have done better," laughed Meredith. "That will catch him without doubt. But where are you going in the mean time? I suppose the first thing will be to lock me up?"

"No, I shan't do that just yet. I shall need your assistance in this business. But it won't do to remain here."

Burr put his head out of the window and gave the driver orders to drive out into Fifth avenue, and down that thoroughfare until he was told to turn back. Accordingly the carriage rolled away and the detective settled back into his seat.

He did not remove the handcuffs from his prisoner's wrists, deeming it safer to leave him ironed until he was ready to use him.

Meredith appeared not to mind it and chatted along as gayly as if they had been out for a pleasure trip.

After talking on a variety of subjects, the young man suddenly said:

"It makes little difference what becomes of me now. The plot by which I hoped to achieve a fortune has fallen through owing to your keen detective work, and I am only a penniless vagabond anyway; and yet I am curious to know what my fate is to be."

Burr did not answer him directly, but the question set him to thinking.

At the end of several minutes he replied:

"In view of what you have done, what do you consider your fate should be?"

"Oh, hanging, I suppose," was the unconcerned response. "That is what I richly deserve, and I am at least man enough to ask for nothing that I do not deserve. At the same time, villain that I am and hopeless as my situation would be even with liberty, life and liberty are as sweet to me, I imagine, as they could be to an honest man with a fortune to spend. Besides, feeling as I do now, I do not know but there might be a hope of my redeeming myself yet if—but—" he suddenly broke off, "this is equivalent to asking for mercy or clemency, and I deserve neither."

The detective was silent again for some time, but finally resumed:

"Yes, your crimes have entitled you to severe punishment. There can be no denying that fact. At the same time, there is one point in your favor. Your frankness recommends you to me. Your youth also pleads for you. That you are weak and reckless is also apparent, and that, too, con-

sidering your misfortunes and the vicious company into which you have been thrown, has its weight with me. You are still young, and if you have a mind, there is no reason why you may not yet redeem your past and make something of yourself. If you are sufficiently strong and determined, this experience ought to serve as a wholesome lesson to you. Do you not think you might become an honest man, if you were given the opportunity?"

The young man's countenance had undergone a wonderful change. It had softened, and the look of recklessness had given way to one of contrition and tenderness.

Thad also noticed that a tear stood in his eyes.

"Yes," he said in a voice tremulous with emotion. "I know that I could become an honest man. But what is the use? My past is against me. Nobody would trust me now."

"I am not so sure about that. Of course those who are acquainted with your past would still be suspicious of you, but there are plenty of people who know nothing of your antecedents, and to them you must go for friendship and assistance. By the way, in your recital this afternoon you mentioned the fact that you were once an employee in the bank of Mr. Myers."

"So I was, for a short time. I forgot to explain that part of my career. When I first came on here with Rochfort and was made acquainted with Mrs. Myers as her son, we thought it would help our scheme for me to get a situation in the bank, which would give me an opportunity of studying the inside workings of it. My alleged mother was only too anxious to get me into something where I could earn a little, believing that it would be the means of taming me down and also of relieving her own purse of its terrible strain. She therefore recommended me to her husband, under the guise of her nephew, of course, and there being a vacancy at the time, the old gentleman did not hesitate to take me in and give me one of the best positions in the establishment, outside of cashier and assistant, of course."

"How came you to lose the place?"

"Dishonesty. Although, outside of my salary, which was an ample one, I was still supplied by Mrs. Myers with large sums, my extravagance was such that my means frequently ran short, and I was not slow to supply the deficiency out of the funds of the bank coming into my hands. Dawson soon discovered my trickery, but only admonished me at first and made the amounts good out of his own pocket. But when the thing had been repeated several times and there appeared to be no hope of my reforming, he finally dismissed me."

"Do you not recognize the base ingratitude of which you have been guilty in conspiring to ruin this noble fellow after all he had done for you?"

Meredith hung his head with shame and a crimson flush covered his face.

"I certainly do," he faltered. "And this is my chief reason for desiring life and liberty, that I may be able in time to repay the amounts advanced by him to shield me from arrest, and furthermore to in some measure repay him the debt of gratitude I owe him."

"And do you think you would try to do this, if you were given the opportunity?"

"That would be the aim of my life," declared the young man earnestly.

"Well, then, you may be given the opportunity," rejoined the detective in a kindly tone.

"What?"

And the young man was about to throw himself upon his knees at the detective's feet, but the latter pushed him gently back into his seat and resumed:

"This will depend, of course, upon your conduct this evening. If you prove faithful in the duties to which I shall assign you—if your actions bear the stamp of honor, and you assist me faithfully to capture Rochfort, I shall not only set you at liberty, but do all in my power to have you reinstated in the bank in your old position."

"Oh, sir, you overwhelm me with your kindness!" cried Meredith in raptures, "and you shall see how faithfully I will discharge every duty imposed upon me, even if it costs me my life. I shall not rest until that scoundrel is under lock and key."

"That is all I ask," rejoined Thad. "And when that is done we will talk about your future."

As he concluded this sentence Burr noticed that the young man had suddenly become interested in some object outside of the carriage window, and so much absorbed did he seem to be that Thad finally asked him what he saw.

"If I am not very much mistaken," returned Meredith, without removing his eyes from the object of his absorption, "that is Rochfort's carriage just ahead of us."

"What?" gasped Thad, putting his face to the window.

"The one just ahead," repeated the young man. "I wonder where he is going."

"Are you sure it is his carriage?"

"Not quite, but I am almost sure of it. You notice it is a peculiar one. You won't often see one like it. If he is in it, I wonder where he can be going."

They were by this time in the vicinity of Madison Square.

"He is evidently making his way toward the lower end of the city with a view to escaping to Jersey or Brooklyn, most likely," suggested Burr.

But while he was still speaking the carriage in question suddenly wheeled about and turned across Twenty-fifth street toward the East side.

Putting his head out of the window, the detective called the driver's attention to the carriage ahead, and ordered him to follow and keep it in sight.

The driver obeyed, and was soon following in the wake of the other vehicle.

Rochfort's carriage went as far east as Fourth avenue only, and then turned up-town.

"I wonder what he is up to?" mused Meredith.

"If it is Rochfort's carriage," observed Thad; "he has probably noticed us and is endeavoring to give us the slip."

"If that is the case, it's a wonder he doesn't drive faster."

As a matter of fact, the carriage was creeping along at a remarkably slow pace.

"That may be for the purpose of throwing us off the scent. He knows that we would suspect him if he were to drive at a rapid rate of speed, whereas he probably thinks to hoodwink us by driving at this snail's pace."

Meanwhile the carriage was poking along not more than twenty paces ahead, and whoever the occupant was, he did not appear to care whether he ever got up-town or not.

This continued for a long time, and Thad and his companion were wondering where the fellow was likely to pull up, when the carriage turned into a side street, went as far as Fifth avenue, turned up-town again, and finally stopped in front of a residence.

Burr and Meredith looked at each other in astonishment.

The house where the carriage had stopped was that of Mr. Myers, the banker.

"I wonder what he is up to now?" pondered Burr.

"I think I can guess," rejoined Meredith.

"What?"

"Impatient at my not returning with the money, he has decided to call upon Mrs. Myers himself and see what is the matter."

"You are probably right. But this is a bold piece of business, after what has passed, don't you think so?"

"Oh, there is nothing too bold for him to attempt."

"Well, he'll never get out of this house without bracelets on," vowed the detective.

By this time his carriage had come up with the other one, and the driver, acting on his own idea, pulled up.

Thad was too intent upon watching the door of the other vehicle to notice the indiscretion of this action, and a moment later the door opened and, to his utter astonishment, a woman got out. His first impression was that it was either Mrs. Myers or Estelle, but he was not long in discovering that it was neither.

He watched the woman in silence, and saw her go up the stoop and ring the bell. She appeared to have received no response, for she was seen to ring a second time, and then the door opened and she was seen to be con-

versing with somebody who had come to the door.

Finally she turned away and came down to her carriage again, but just then noticing Thad's carriage, she came up to the door and, throwing back her veil, revealing a very pretty face, she began:

"Pardon me, gentlemen, but as I see that you have stopped before this house, I assume that you know something about the people who live there."

"I know a little about them," replied Burr, puzzled at the question. "What do you wish to know about them?"

"A Mr. Myers lives there, does he not?"

"Yes."

"And he has a daughter named Estelle?" she went on, at the same time taking a letter from her pocket and referring to it.

"He has. What—?"

Before he could complete the question she thrust the letter in through the open window with the request:

"Look at that."

Burr took the letter and glancing it over, saw that it was from Estelle Myers and was addressed to Rochfort. It was the identical letter in which she had proposed to accept Rochfort's offer of marriage.

The detective raised his eyes inquiringly to the woman, and she did not keep him long in suspense.

"I just discovered that letter among my husband's papers this afternoon," she explained, "and I am anxious to know what this person means by offering to marry him."

"Your husband?" gasped Thad.

"Yes. Herbert Rochfort is my husband, and I am at a loss to know the meaning of this. If the young woman is ignorant of his being a married man I have nothing to say to her, but if she is guilty of trying to lure him away from me—"

"Set your mind at rest on that score, madam," interrupted Burr. "The young lady is as innocent of any wrong-doing as yourself. The fact is, that your husband has been using his wiles to deceive her, but her eyes are at last open and there is no danger of a consummation of this outrage."

Thad then proceeded to relate the details of the scheme by which the scoundrel had proposed to marry the innocent girl for the purpose of securing her fortune, not omitting to allude in strong terms to the other rascalities in which he was engaged, and concluded by asking where Rochfort could be found at present.

The woman did not reply at once, but stared at him with a bewildered expression for some moments, and then asked:

"Are you a detective, sir?"

Thad hesitated, but finally decided that it would not be well to be too frank with this woman of whom he knew nothing, and replied:

"No. Only a friend of the family. But I should like to know where your husband is."

"That I do not know. I did not know but I might find him with this woman. They tell me at the house that there is nobody at home. That they all left early in the day. I wonder where they have gone."

Thad thought rapidly. If he should say he did not know, the woman would be likely to return home, and if she did, and her husband should happen to be there, it would be the most likely thing in the world for her to tell him what she had heard from the detective, which would spoil everything.

Therefore he decided to throw her off the track for the time being, in order that she might not upset his plans.

Just as he was about to speak, Meredith nudged him and whispered:

"Tell her they've gone to my country-place. She knows where it is, and will go there. The ride won't hurt her, and she will be out of our way for the next couple of hours anyway."

Burr saw that the suggestion was a good one, and concluded to act upon it.

"Do you know where young Mr. Meredith's country house is, madam?" he asked.

"Yes," she replied quickly.

"Well, Mr. Myers and his wife went there to-day, and it is possible the young lady may have also gone."

She hesitated a moment, and then merely thanking him for the information, turned and entered her own carriage. A moment

later Thad had the satisfaction of seeing it roll away up-town.

"That settles her for the present," he laughed, and then ordered the driver to return to Rochfort's house.

"Yes, that settles her," echoed Meredith with a sigh of relief, "but my heart has been in my mouth for the last several minutes for fear you would say something that would arouse her suspicion as to who you were."

"I came near enough to it, I assure you," rejoined the detective, "but your timely suggestion saved us. By the way, did you know anything about this wife of Rochfort's before?"

"I knew that he was living with a woman whom he called his wife, but I was not aware they were married, and I do not believe it yet, although I may be mistaken."

"I am inclined to believe you are mistaken, for this woman had the appearance of an honest person, and she has probably been deceived by this villain like the rest of you. Was she aware of the existence of the plot in which he and you were implicated?"

"I do not know, but I do not believe she was. I know he always avoided speaking of it in her presence, and warned me not to say anything that would be likely to arouse her suspicions as to what we were doing. Yes, I think she was innocent of this, anyway."

"I hope so. But here we are back to his house. Now what is your programme?"

"I shall go in, as before, and if I am lucky enough to find him at home, I shall tell him that Mrs. Myers refused to give me the money unless we came to the house for it."

"But suppose he is afraid to go to the house and insists upon your going alone?"

"I can get over that all right. I will tell him that he needn't go in, but that I may not bring the money back if he does not accompany me. That you are hot on my track and I may need assistance to fight clear of you."

"No, I should not mention anything about that," suggested Burr, "as it may frighten him off. Tell him that as the sum she has promised you is a large one, you may be tempted to go off with it, or something of that kind. Anything to get him into the carriage. It is now dark enough so that he will not be likely to recognize me, and once we get him in here, I can manage him."

"Well, I will try to manage matters," responded the young man. "But you'll have to remove these darbies before I can do anything."

Here he held up his shackled wrists to the detective.

The latter took the key from his pocket and soon had the handcuffs removed.

Meredith then left the carriage, and a moment later rung the bell of Rochfort's door.

It had grown quite dark by this time, and when Rochfort accompanied Meredith to the carriage, a few moments later, he did not recognize the man in the dark corner whom Meredith introduced as Mr. Darling, a particular friend of his.

Nor did the arch villain notice where the driver was going until the cab pulled up in front of the Central Station and the vehicle was surrounded by blue-coats, in accordance with a telephone message Thad had sent in on his way across the river.

Rochfort uttered but one sentence on finding himself in the clutches of the law.

Turning to Meredith he hissed: "This is your work, you contemptible imp! That is what one gets for nursing a serpent."

When his game was safely behind the bars, Thad Burr drove with all haste to Brooklyn, where Dawson was anxiously waiting for him.

But he was not the only one who was awaiting his coming; the banker, his wife and Estelle were there.

Dawson and Estelle had already adjusted their differences and appeared very happy.

The banker and his wife were also happy, and one and all greeted the great detective effusively.

"We can never repay you for all this happiness!" cried the banker, as he grasped Burr's hand. "The whole of this story can never be told. How you have removed the stain from an innocent man's name, how you have saved the name of a pure and noble woman and rescued another from a

fate worse than death. You cannot make your figures too high for your grand work, sir!"

"I shall not bankrupt you with my bill, my dear sir," laughed the detective. "I am pretty well paid at the sight of all this happiness, and shall leave the rest to you."

"As for me," interposed Dawson, "it is needless to tell you how more than thankful I am, but I must humbly ask your pardon for the occasional fits of impatience and distrust into which I fell, and especially for disobeying your injunctions in writing that shameful letter."

"Which nearly resulted in a tragedy," added the banker's wife.

"And would, had it not been for the intervention of poor little Dixie," put in Estelle.

"Yes," coincided the detective. "By the way, where is Dixie?"

"Here she is!" cried a little voice, as the little woman emerged from behind the portieres that shut off the adjoining room. "Who has anything to say about Dixie?"

"Nobody, my girl," cried the old gentleman, rapturously, "except that you are a dear, thoughtful little girl, and I owe the life of my dear wife and the fact that I am not a murderer to you."

THE END.

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